

LITERARY URBANISM, VISUALITY AND MODERNITY

by

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## **Abstract**

*Literary Urbanism and the Symbolist Aesthetic* argues that the modern city influences urban writers to develop particular literary-visual practices that translate urban experience into poetry and prose. Chapter one considers how urban planning in Paris during the Second Empire inspired Charles Baudelaire's theories of modernity and aesthetic history. Chapter two discusses how A.C. Swinburne translates Baudelairean modernity into an English literary perspective through Sapphic poetry, and the importance Swinburne's association with painters has in this process. Swinburne's friendship with James McNeill Whistler, for example, results in the ekphrastic poem "Hermaphroditus," which uses sculpture to comment upon the modern city's potential to heighten perceptual consciousness. Chapter three studies the application of ekphrasis in urban writing, especially the way in which Arthur Symons' poetry uses symbols to render an immediate awareness of the city. Symons' reception of French Symbolist poetics opens chapter four, and introduces T.E. Hulme and Henri Bergson as theorists who develop a means of thinking the city through internal consciousness, not geographic space. This initiates chapter five's interest in how Pound and Eliot use metaphors of illumination to articulate how perceptions of the city arrive through transposition and refraction.

For

John B. Tepe Jr. and Emily E.S. Tepe

Constance H. Cone and Michael M. Cone

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This thesis follows MLA standards for punctuation, including double quotation and full stop and comma placement within quotation marks. English standards have otherwise been followed for spellings.

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## **Introduction: The Symbolist City**

Julian Wolfreys has recently noted in *Writing London* that the materiality of the city coexists alongside the materiality of language.<sup>1</sup> The metropolis keeps us alive by providing the environment in which we communicate with one another; it allows us to speak, and thereby provides for our psychological well-being. The link Wolfreys identifies between material language, i.e. text, and the city is at the heart of this study, which itself examines how images of the urban environment manifest in literary and poetical works, and how subsequent literary images of the city impact the writing processes of the urban author. This enquiry investigates how literary urbanism is representative of both a specific form of cultural modernity and the very techniques writers and artists use to bring the matter of the city into print.

More particularly, my argument focuses on the concept of modernity and its representation in late nineteenth and early twentieth century poetry and prose as a specific, urban-based visual practice. The ways in which individuals perform, represent, and manipulate the codes enforced by the built environment lie at the heart of this study. Further, because my argument focuses upon visuality, it has a considerable interdisciplinary interest and uses examples taken from the fine arts and criticism from the history of art to best explain its points. The aesthetic concepts presented in essays like Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* and paintings like Manet's *Olympia* describe artistic techniques that rupture conventional ways of looking to allow for varied

representations of time and space in the city. The modelling of modernity as a visual concept grapples with literary urbanism in a number of ways, first being how the city, as an architectural and geographical being, manifests spatially in the body and in the mind of the city dweller. Subsequently, visual modernity considers how the city dweller, through body and mind, perceives the city; and from here, how the city and the city dweller together allow for representations of urban life to arise in literature and the fine arts. In drawing these three concerns together, the thesis focuses on how artists work within a “symbolist” city which functions doubly as a resource for technical method and as a resource for poetic and painted subjects. This symbolist city combines the aesthetic concerns of the visual artist with the practical demands of living and working in the urban environment. It represents at once the physical, sensing body and the practices employed by the mind to fold the sensed environment into a conscious state.

This thesis maps a trajectory that follows how writers understood and coped with the manifestation, perception, and representation of urban space. Through that trajectory, it shows the technical developments that arose amongst urban artist as they wrote the city into poetry and prose. In so doing it analyses works by artists associated with well known movements including Impressionism, Symbolism, and Modernism. However, I must emphasise that my argument is concerned not with the literary histories of these movements, but rather with the technical developments, innovations, and influences occurring across them. I am interested in locating developments in how authors and poets write about the city, and more particularly, how those developments use vision as a way to articulate the phenomenon of modernity. Thus, the artists and writers included have been selected because of common interest and common method. The letters shared between



Charles Baudelaire and Edouard Manet, between Algernon Charles Swinburne and James McNeill Whistler, and the friendships between Arthur Symons, Paul Verlaine, and Stéphane Mallarmé, and between Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot bespeak a common technical and methodological concern with the depiction of urban life and modernity in the city. For this reason, I have followed Paul Valéry's initiative and chosen artists whose work exudes a commonality of spirit and practice.

Valéry's essay *L'Existence du Symbolisme* (1939) provides an excellent account of problems related to the textual representation of urban life, aptly relating the general quandary that "a word is an un-plumbable abyss" to the more specific difficulty in articulating the visual world through words.<sup>2</sup> Valéry notes, "the evocative power of a word is without limits; all the arbitrariness of spirit at its disposal: you can neither confine nor confirm the diverse associations of the word 'Symbolism'" (687). Valéry contextualises his enquiry into how symbolic language conveys meaning through an explanation of "the Symbolist movement" in France in the late 1800s. Having noted the impossibility of finding a categorical definition or summation of the term "symbolism," he goes about organising the essay around the thesis that Symbolism, as either an abstract term or a movement, only gains meaning through its association with innovation and iconoclasm. Symbolism, for Valéry, is an aesthetic with no unitary aesthetic:

We arrive at this paradox: a moment in the history of aesthetics which cannot define itself in aesthetic terms [. . .] I say that our symbolists, so diverse, were united by some negation, and this negation is independent of their temperaments

and their creative roles as artists. They made one common resolution among them: to disdain public success. And not only did they refuse to pander to the public [. . .] but they jeered and ridiculed outcry from the most established journals [. . .] They contrived a sort of revolution in the order of values, as they thoroughly replaced the notion of books that solicited a public [. . .] to books which created their own public. (691)

This study considers Valéry's valuation of symbolism, not as a movement, but as a trope of continued technical innovation which responded to the problems and prospects of urban modernity. More specifically, it investigates the specific techniques and practices urban writers use to articulate modernity as a visual phenomenon borne by and from the city. Painters like Manet, in France, and Whistler, in England, create images that reference the newness of the city as a built environment while also noting (and often refuting), how that built environment affects perception. It is with these ideas in mind that I apply the term "symbolist" to the city. The city is the workspace in which writers develop methodologies for expressing and critiquing modernity. The symbolist city is a space deeply informed by technicality. It is both a built infrastructure subject to construction, reconstruction, and modernisation and also the practical medium through which urban writers test their aesthetic concerns for how this "new" modernity affects seeing.

Indeed, much of my work considers modernity as a concept and as a physical reality, using Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) as a starting point. This essay offers a conception of visual reality that allows artists to re-imagine the

physiological perception of reality as something fixed and unchanging, and this is the strand of thought I would like to weave through this thesis. For Valéry, the heat of Symbolist rebellion forges innovation and the particular innovations in modes and methods of seeing drive my work. This thesis uses vision to delineate a constellation of writers whose work in the city bears the mark of a specific ocular technique or way of looking. The visual tactics these authors invoke bear witness to the linguistic capacity of the city to rework conventional perception of urban reality.

However, before proceeding into that essay's rather heady and conceptual explanation, it is worth noting the power and clarity of Emile Zola's characterisation of modernity in *Nana* (1880).<sup>3</sup> The novel keenly examines the emergence of modernity as an urban phenomenon present both in the physical infrastructure of Paris and in the mental awareness of Parisians. In considering *Nana*, I aim to highlight the significance themes like performance and representation play in understanding the interrelationship between literary urbanism, visuality, and modernity. This in turn will signal later chapters' analysis of the visual practices driving literary urbanism. Using *Nana* as a case study will show how urban artistry arises through acts of mutual inscription between artist and city. Representations of urban life arise through depictions made by the artist, and yet the artist's own ability arises from the energies of the city itself. This paradox, so well articulated in *Nana*, forms the crux of Baudelaire's argument in *The Painter of Modern Life*. Further, the novel signals Baudelaire's significance as a source of inspiration. Zola executes Baudelaire's theories in his fiction; and though Zola is not a primary focus of the thesis, *Nana* does exhibit traits other writers consider and develop.

*Nana* uses theatrical performance to examine the social dynamic the reconstruction of Paris puts in motion. The novel is set within Napoleon III's plan to modernise the French capital. Accordingly, the text draws a parallel between the reconstruction of Paris and a courtesan's methods for gaining social standing. Nana's rise to fame accentuates the performative power of the refurbished city. Zola presents Paris as a site of translation in which men and women enact a transformative textual practice upon the historical, cultural and ideological city.<sup>4</sup> While Haussmann rebuilds Parisian infrastructure, Nana uses her body to join the carnality of a prostitute selling her body to an image of divine beauty and desire.

Zola's novel articulates the double position of women in an age dominated by masculine power systems of explanation. Terry Eagleton explains, "The woman is both inside and outside male society, both a romantically idealized member of it and a victimized outcast. She is sometimes what stands between men and chaos, and sometimes the embodiment of chaos itself."<sup>5</sup> The confident and assertive courtesan dramatises the fine line between order and chaos when she acts onstage. Bordenave, director of the Théâtre des Variétés, describes his star as having "something else, dammit, and something that takes the place of everything else. I've scented it out and it smells damnably strong in her" (22). When Nana appears, her presence accentuates that "something else," and her bodily movements trace out that chaotic feminine figure Eagleton identifies:

This was Venus rising from the waves, with no veil save her tresses. And when Nana raised her arms, the golden hair of her armpits could be seen in the glare of

the footlights. There was no applause [. . .] All of a sudden in the good-natured child the woman stood revealed, a disturbing woman with all the impulsive madness of her sex, opening the gates of the unknown worlds of desire. Nana was still smiling, but with the deadly smile of a man eater. (45)

Nana brings “Venus down to street level and [sits] her in the gutter” and this levelling of convention establishes the process through which Nana presents herself from the rabble of the city (39). Nana’s explicit nakedness grotesques the pure nudity of a divine goddess. Her raised arms and hairy armpits empower the female sex worker while articulating the artificiality of the new Paris Napoleon III has contrived.

Bordenave’s reworking of the Venus myth at the Théâtre des Variétés aptly debuts Nana’s theatrical Paris and Napoleon III’s imperial Paris as one in the same. Both courtesan and city are put on show. Nana turns the divine rising of Venus from the waves into a striptease and so doing exposes Napoleon III using Mars, God of War, as the namesake for a muddled display of imperial authority:

‘It’s going to be splendid,’ said the Count [. . .] ‘I visited the Champ-de-Mars today, and came away completely wonder struck.’ ‘They say it won’t be ready in time,’ La Faloise ventured to remark. There’s such a muddle...’ But the Count interrupted him with his severe voice: ‘It will be ready. That’s the Emperor’s wish.’ (40)

The planned glory of the Exhibition can do nothing to silence the rumour La Faloise hears from spreading through the city. From these murmurs *Nana* draws attention to how a physical body on display in the city deconstructs controlling representations of the urban landscape. The “Blonde Venus” performance reconfigures the parameters the audience uses to judge what it sees. Though the first glimpse of her takes the audience’s breath away, nearly every viewing male falls in love with her (32). Nana’s indecent exposure incites a bodily reaction at odds with more conservative judgements. Once Georges Muffat, scion of one of the grandest Parisian families, exclaims, “That’s it! Jolly good! Bravo!” Nana’s shrill voice tickle the audience “so deftly in the right place that it sent a shiver down them” (33). Nana’s dance elicits an uncontrollable bodily reaction. Muffat’s verbal ejaculation consummates the discrepancy between Nana’s fleshy display and the unfinished Exhibition site at the Champ-de-Mars.

Nana’s rousing debut articulates how the city, as a lived environment, resists the fixed representations imposed upon it. The aroma Bordenave smells on Nana rises from the dust of a Parisian building site. Her arrival on the Parisian scene signals not only the reconstruction of an outdated city, but the exposure and erosion of fabricated ideals. The old-world propriety of the Muffat mansion in Rue Miromesnil, at the corner of Rue de Penthièvre, is brought into happy friction with the reshaped Champ-de-Mars as Zola mixes his courtesan into an urban amalgamation. The Théâtre des Variétés joins the new city of the Second Empire to the old establishment. In the *Blonde Venus* we find what Derrida calls “l’impossible ce qui arrive.”<sup>6</sup> That is, the shifting images of Paris as both modern and mythic ideal confound the linear. The new city and the old, conservative order are both

rendered false while stronger, more pervasive desires are reemphasised and brought to the fore. Present moments are shadowed by spectres from the past. The flawed Roman image staged in the Théâtre des Variétés spoils the image of what the reconstructed Champ-de-Mars will become.

David Baguley has shown how Zola's writings invoke a poetics of disintegration and spent energy.<sup>7</sup> Might the dissipation Baguley mentions reveal spaces in which the metropolis arises in alternate literary configurations? How does the physical configuration of the urban environment influence writing practices and techniques? Does urban writing textually reproduce the spaces of the city? I want to arrange a collection of texts around ways in which the metropolis directly influences the way a writer sees his subject and writes it into a text. *Nana* introduces urban writing as a mutual inscription the urban environment enables its representation by the artist. This paradox forms the central issue of *The Painter of Modern Life* and Baudelaire's poetry collections, *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler*. Mutual inscription, as invoked in these writings, initiates a line of literary inheritance amongst urban writers beginning in Paris in the late nineteenth century and continuing through London in the early twentieth century.

In *The Painter of Modern Life* Charles Baudelaire uses the city to derive a "historical theory of beauty" in which fragments of the past inhabit and interpenetrate present life.<sup>8</sup> The essay opens with a précis on the city's temporal nature:

The past is interesting not only by reason of the beauty which could be distilled from it [. . .] but also precisely because it is the past, for its historical value [. . . .]

The pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present is due not only to the beauty with which it can be invested, but also to its essential quality of being present. (1)

The way value is either invested in or distilled from material reality is central here, because it determines precisely how the artist engages with the forces of history from within his present perspective. Pleasure, argues Baudelaire, exists regardless of the way it is rendered or conveyed through artistic representation. It is simply here, regardless of form or shape. Similarly, the past is interesting not because of the satisfaction we derive by arranging and rearranging through historical study, but simply for its value as experience. Baudelaire's point here is that beauty arrives not in the superficial arrangement of reality, but in the techniques we use to access the beauty available in reality. The body of the material world is ever variable; we can invest or divest any number of meanings, correlations, or associations in it or from it. And yet underneath, behind, and within the superficial materiality of reality persists an aesthetic element accessible via a specific method of looking; Baudelaire offers an ontology of vision that alters the way one reads the city.

Following its title, *The Painter of Modern Life* is an essay which theorises on the visual ability of the city dweller through an extended metaphor that likens the urban experience to the creative process of drawing or painting, and uses technical aspects of the



fine arts to make its points. The link between vision and memory especially interests Baudelaire, and he uses the city to describe the process through which the physical faculties of sight are transferred to the mind, “remembered” by the inner eye, and then recreated by hand on paper or canvas. The artist must recover the image at two levels, taking it directly from its primary environment, which in this case is Paris, and then from the secondary world of the imagination. And these transferences must happen at great speed, for the city is always moving out of sight. Citing Edgar Allan Poe, the essay describes a process in which the city draws the painting and writing together around a “half-glance”:

Do you remember a picture (it really is a picture!), painted - or rather written – by the most powerful pen of our age, and entitled *The Man of the Crowd* ? In the window of a coffee house there sits a convalescent, pleasurably absorbed in gazing at the crowd, and mingling, through the medium of thought, in the turmoil of thought that surrounds him [ . . . ] Finally he hurls himself headlong in the midst of the throng, in pursuit of an unknown, half-glimpsed countenance that has, on an instant, bewitched him. (7)

The crowd moves faster than the eye, and thus physical perception of it is always incomplete. Through Poe’s *Man of the Crowd*, Baudelaire articulates a space in which ocular perception arrives at an instant of crisis in which the visible world occupies the very periphery of sight. Thus, the artist must always chase what he sees, desperately seeking to remember an image which is at best incomplete. Vision in this case involves a giving up in

which the authority of the artist's gaze submits to the city and results in moments when the city speaks through the writer through the expressive currents of human movement in the crowd. This practice of letting go unveils the city as a process and becoming, rather than a product or ontological being.<sup>9</sup> The half-glimpse described in *The Painter of Modern Life* frames my examination of Baudelaire's poetics in Chapter one, as related to the visual impact of Baron Eugène Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris during Napoleon III's Second Empire.

For Baudelaire the poet accesses a speaking city through an eye line strained by the crowded spaces of urban life. But "crowded," for Baudelaire, speaks not only to the number of city residents, but also to spaces crowded by other spaces, or spaces suffused with memory. The crisis experienced by the man in the crowd is a revelation in expansion, as the multiple forms representing material objects and spaces unfolds his observing eye. Poems like "The Eyes of the Poor" from *The Parisian Prowler (Le Spleen de Paris)* (1869) and "The Swan" and "Carrion" from *The Flowers of Evil (Les Fleurs du Mal)* (1857) bring about this unfolding through the poetic negotiation of artistic vision with the urban environment. These poems evoke a powerful sense of unity with the speaker's stereoscopic vision. Their speakers' interact with the metropolis so as to allow its multiple voices thorough the multiple perspectives of the poetic speaker.

Together, *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler* complicate the distinction between conventional sight and the ways of oblique looking demanded by the city. The city permeates the poet's writing process and invokes a synaesthetic fluidity that allows for

a vision that sees the past and the present coexist within the frame of a poetic image. Baudelaire's poetics arrives out of the rebuilt spaces of the Second Empire, spaces in which the ruined fragments of the medieval city litter the boulevards and cafés of the new, brightly lit metropolis. Paris and poetry find a common structure through their treatment of the physical environment and that environment's effect on perception. The temporal dynamic which makes the past and present arrive simultaneously allows for the city's translation into mental space and from there into poetry.

Indeed, this metamorphosis balances the writer's artistic self-consciousness with a larger consciousness of the city. The urban environment comes to shape not only through physical, architectural construction, but through mental conceptions of space as well. Indeed, urban writers in London had to find ways to immerse themselves in Paris mentally, since living and seeing Paris as a native would be difficult indeed. And yet, though London writers could not access a Baudelairean Paris physically, they were able to do so through the spaces created in his writings. With this in mind, I would like to use Algernon Charles Swinburne to bring forward a theory for the transference of Parisian urban poetics to London in chapter two, tracing a trajectory of poetical technique that allows Swinburne to use poetry as a space for seeing the Parisian cityscape into British lyric poetry.

The correlation between the interior life of the city and the interior life of the poet becomes a crucial concern for tracing the path Baudelaire's aesthetics takes to enter Britain and the British consciousness. It is an ability to see inside *The Flowers of Evil* that allows Swinburne to delve into the modernity Baudelaire finds so impressive. By working

through the temporal forces of the past and the present invoked in Baudelaire's work, Swinburne is able to use Sapphic poetry as a means for seeing inside and through Second Empire Paris. The idea that city images might be captured in poetic verses is essentially potent here, for it allows Swinburne to align himself with Baudelaire through their common association with the Greek poetess Sappho. Swinburne was a keen translator of French and Greek verse, and used his linguistic acumen to familiarise contemporary readers with Baudelaire's and Sappho's respective work.

Chapter two shows the ways in which Swinburne uses the female body as a way to translate Baudelairean modernity into an English poetics. He uses his working knowledge of *The Flowers of Evil* to find a shared voice between himself and Baudelaire and then through that shared voice transmit the historical theory of beauty discussed in *The Painter of Modern Life* through his own translations of Sapphic poetry. Swinburne ably uses Baudelaire's conflation of the physical and spatial bodies in "Lesbos" to bring his own poetry into arrangement with Baudelaire and Sappho. By including translations of Sappho's work into the *Poems and Ballads* series, Swinburne is able to draw the energies of Second Empire Paris through the poeticised spaces and bodies of Ancient Greece, and from there to London in his own published collection.

Swinburne's acquaintance with French painters Edouard Manet and Henri Fantin-Latour informs the ways in which he uses the female body to transmit modernity to England. Manet's depiction of a prostitute in the painting *Olympia* (1865), uses the nude female form to express a gap in the leisure culture Napoleon III hoped his rebuilt Paris

would inspire. Manet exploited Second Empire Paris' focus on display to bring a fallen woman, formerly confined to the edges of society, into the focal centre of Paris' pleasure-orientated visual culture. By so conspicuously highlighting the prostitute's conspicuous absence from contemporary art at the time, Manet's bold portrait uses the female body as a text for charting a fictive map of urban spaces – the spaces of modernity.<sup>10</sup>

Like Manet, Swinburne too uses the female nude as a way to read the city, and by merging Baudelaire's Parisian awareness of the classical world with his own, he uses poetry as a way to move between the spaces of Ancient Greece, Paris, and London. The Sapphic fragments and *The Flowers of Evil* are maps, and Swinburne uses translation as a way to move amongst the interior spaces of their verse. Swinburne, I argue, uses his knowledge of visual culture to power his translations; following Jonathan Crary's work on the *camera obscura*, I look to show how the lyrics he produces in the *Poems and Ballads* series (1866, 1878, 1889) arrive through a practice of internal vision in which "the observer [. . .] is ultimately seeking insight into a universal language of symbols and analogies that might be employed in the directing and harnessing of the forces of nature" – that force being Parisian modernity.<sup>11</sup> Poems like "Anactoria" in *Series I* enact a violent modernity that manipulates the fragments of Sapphic poetry to transmit French aesthetics through the lines of Hellenic verse. Swinburne's work marks a crucial development in the way bodily, poetical, and geographic spaces are imagined together with urban modernity in an English lyrical context.

Chapter two delineates the processes through which the intersections between visual culture and literature in France find expression in England. Making an early connection between Manet's *Olympia* and Swinburne's poetic practice allows for a more explicit analysis of the way Swinburne composes his poem "Hermaphroditus" from a statue he saw at the Louvre. The direct interplay between literature and the fine arts here develops into the focus of chapter three, in which I link the work of three urban writers during the fin de siècle: Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, and Arthur Symons to the classical rhetorical practice called ekphrasis, which allows speakers to bring a remote physical object or environment into an audience's immediate field of perception. The ways in which Wilde, Field, and Symons textualise visual images of the London metropolis are at the centre of my analysis, which itself is grounded in an appraisal of visual culture in late nineteenth century England and its links to the aesthetic and decadent movements of the time. Successive explications of Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Field's verse collection *Sight and Song* (1892) and Symons' verse collection *Sillhouettes* (1893) will examine the ways in which the city manifests in literature through the power of ekphrastic *enargeia*, that energy which links the written or spoken world intrinsically to the object of discussion.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a dynamic of homosocial desire powers the title character's wish for eternal youth, transferring the physical effects of age and abuse away from the body itself and onto a portrait. The novel uses ekphrasis to express a paradox in which physical beauty arrives from those qualities which seem to deny it: the more Dorian relishes his eternal youth, the more hideous his painting becomes.<sup>12</sup> The painting's visual representation of vice and overindulgence allows Dorian to experience the pleasure of the

city directly; he never ages and never has a guilty conscience, and thus has nothing to hold him back from doing whatever he wants in the vast metropolis. Instead, the painting bears the effect of Dorian's urban adventures, and traps his downward spiralling urban adventures in the East End into a single image. The portrait maps Dorian's personal city, and the ongoing juxtaposition of Dorian's immaculate physical beauty and his horrid, opium addled portrait bespeaks the "tempestuous loveliness of terror" brought about through the *enargeia* of ekphrasis.

In a similar vein, Edith Cooper and Catherine Bradley, writing together under the pseudonym Michael Field, use poetry as a way to come in direct mental contact with the painted work of art. By rendering verse translations of painted images, these poetesses are able to use physical vision as a catalyst for complete imaginative immersion into visual art. By writing the painting, they quite literally enter the painted environment. *Sight and Song* sets up the particular strategies through which Arthur Symons applies ekphrasis directly to the city, in that the art object, not the artist, drives the visual translation of a painted image into verse. For Field, the painted work houses the *enargeia* required for ekphrasis; for Symons, the city provides the *enargeia* required for a direct immersion into the physical environment. Inspired by Whistler's impressionist techniques, Symons allows the artificial light of the metropolis, cigarette smoke, footlights, and street lamps, to expose a secret city lurking behind the physical forms immediately perceived by the eye. The urban images presented in *Silhouettes* trace out what Symons understands as the development of aesthetics in fin-de-siècle English literature from impressionism to symbolism. The impressionist, in this line of thought, transfers his immediate perception of an object directly onto the page; he "thinks it there," to use Symons' turn of phrase. The symbolist

goes one step further than the impressionist: he or she fuses immediate perception with the imagination. The resulting image appears in soft focus and exposes a hitherto invisible environment from within the geography of the city. The poems I have selected illustrate how the physical light emanating from the city brings about this fusion of memory and imagination and allows for an urban ekphrasis applied directly to the metropolitan environment.

Symons' poetical writings work out a process of visual translation that uses ekphrasis to test the limits of urban representation in literature. In following Baudelaire's initial enquiry into the coexistence of eternal and transitory forms in the city and Swinburne's translation of that concept through translations of Sapphic fragments, Symons' poetry brings about an immediate spiritual transference between artist and city, reader and text. *Silhouettes* suggests London is as an environment in which the artist accesses a higher consciousness or sensibility that extends beyond the conventional realm of physical perception. However, the significance of Symons' work arrives not so much because *Silhouettes* accesses an "invisible" or "eternal" London, but because his writings later writing in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) and *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) test the limits of this sort of vision. Though Symons did not become a proud owner of a first edition *The Flowers of Evil* until 1916, his annotated photographs of Baudelaire's Paris bespeaks an almost intuitive awareness of the Parisian reconstruction initiated during the Second Empire.<sup>13</sup> In his direct application of ekphrasis to the city in *Silhouettes*, he displays a unique awareness of Baudelaire's historical theory of beauty. Symons went so far as to track down his Parisian predecessor's residences, jotting down a synopsis of each one's geographical history as he did so. In doing this, Symons highlights the endless



fragmentation of the city. Though each location seems distinct, Symons' synopses present the sites as remarkably unfixed and unstable. Each has either been moved, or had its immediate neighbourhood demolished, renovated, or replaced with new infrastructure:

Number 10, Quai de Bethune, where Baudelaire lived, was one of the dozen buildings torn down in the widening of the Boulevard Henri IV at the bridge head of Pont de Sully. It probably was much like the number 14, which is now the first house on the opening of the quai, with small, low square rooms and a quaint Renaissance atmosphere. This house forms the street corner, and was once part of the ancient Hotel du President de la Chambre de Comptes Le Ragois de Bretonvillier (1640). One corner tower of this Hotel de Bretonvillier closes the little street at its end, with a great arched porte cochere as its rez de chaussez. The opposite side of the little street held the Hotel d'Astry (1650) where once lived the Duc de Richelieu (1696). The Quai de Bethune was built in 1650, and first named Quai des Balcons.

Rue de Seine, 57 Hotel de Maroc, facing a sunny little Carrefour where three streets which come up from the river meet and cross. Here Baudelaire lived a little, and here again, are the exquisite wrought iron balconies which make the charm of the reconstructed convent, 61, rue Saint Anne, where he also lived. There are no ancient hotels at this upper end of the street, but lower down are the reconstructed remains of the hotel which Marguerite de Valois had built, where she died, 1615, and which was made over by the Marquis de Courmont. At no. 12 rue de seine, are the remains of the Hotel du Duc de Bouillon, father of the great Turenne (1620), where also lived (1725) de la Rouchefoucauld.

Number 10 Quai de Bethune and Rue de Seine, 57 Hotel de Marc represent single spaces which have been refracted through the reconstruction zones of Napoleon III's Paris. The above selections lift the poetical ruminations set in *The Flowers of Evil* to the actual city itself. Symons provides a clear, working example for the historical theory of beauty, providing hard evidence for the transitory forms of superficial reality in *The Painter of Modern Life*. It is almost as if Symons looks at Baudelaire's homes through the half-glance cited from Poe's *Man in the Crowd*; in tracking down each former residence, he unearths the geographical history impacted in each, and then spreads it out for the reader. These fragments' dovetail clarifies the way in which Symons evaluates his own poetics. The aesthetic illustrated in *Silhouettes*, which reveals an invisible city otherwise inaccessible via normal perception, is compared with a spiritual, quasi-religious experience in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and contrasted with the cacophonous sensory experience of inner city life in *Spiritual Adventures*. Through these three works Symons traces out the esoteric potential of the urban environment. His poetics first uses the city as a means for attaining higher reaches of spiritual consciousness before settling back into the maelstrom of urban life, where an inherent link between the mind of the metropolitan artist and the metropolis itself is established.

The preface to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, in which Symons greatly develops his earlier distinction between the impressionist artist and the symbolist artist, articulates a moment of creation in which the absolute world takes on the clothes of human consciousness. This translation, through which an invisible, ultimate reality crystallizes through the linguistic apprehension and expression of material reality,

beg[ins] with the first words uttered by the first man, as he named every living thing; or before them, in heaven, when God named the world into being. And we see, in these beginnings, see precisely what Symbolism in literature really is: a form of expression, at the best but approximate, essentially but arbitrary, until it has obtained the force of a convention, for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness. (1)

Symbolist writing, as expressed above, takes literary production as a metaphor for the materialization of divine reality. Words are spiritual manifestations that bring the world into being. The poet, as one who describes and names reality, channels a voice transmitted by the objects of his attention. But is such contemplation even possible, in an overcrowded and noisy city? Symons takes this reality on in the *Spiritual Adventures* short story “Christian Trevalga” and uses the titular musician’s mental breakdown in London as a way to reassess and re-orientate the valuations made in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Chapter four uses Symons’ revised assessment of London in “Christian Trevalga” as a case study for fin de siècle concerns over intersecting literary and pictorial portraits of the city transition from a spiritual orientation to a closer examination of the metropolitan environment’s relation to order and fragmentation. Trevalga’s situation experiments with the way Verlaine purportedly sleepwalks through city streets, and when the musician collapses at a crowded intersection, the possibility of enlightened, ambulatory meditation seems dubious.

I use *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and “Christian Trevalga” in chapter four to outline and introduce Georg Simmel’s, Henri Bergson’s, and T.E. Hulme’s respective philosophical and literary concerns regarding the impact of metropolitan life on the individual. “Christian Trevalga” marks a turning point the development of urban writing. Here Symons finds the spiritual sensibility underlying *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* inadequate and so redirects investigations of urban modernity back into the city itself. For Simmel, the conflict between the time of the mind and the temporal reality of the city force the individual to erect a barrier between inner consciousness and physical perception. However, Simmel also makes a crucial distinction between the fragmented material reality composed of physical objects and linear time and the exchange economy at work within the matrix of the city. T.E. Hulme and Henri Bergson build upon Simmel’s notion of exchange to postulate on the ways in which the artist might merge him or herself with the city. For Bergson, the artist must recover consciousness from spatially-orientated expression. According to this theory, language arranges meaning through the respective locations of words on a page, which then results in the conventional rendering of the environment according to location based systems such as cartography and geography. Human experience is distinct from this world and cannot be accounted for in terms of space. Thus for Bergson, the metropolis manifests for the city dweller as a consciousness in which the quality of sensory experience is pre-eminent over the quantity of impressions that go into that experience.

T.E. Hulme’s essay “Cinders” (1905) elaborates upon Bergson’s distinction between quality and quantity, using London as a metaphor for a neatly arranged, “counter-based” reality. In asking, “Why is it that London looks pretty by night? Because for the

general cindery chaos there is a substituted simple ordered arrangement of a finite number of lights,” Hulme articulates Bergson’s supposition that the possibility of direct and immediate contact with the city through internal consciousness has been replaced by external, spatially based conceptions of reality.<sup>14</sup> The “cindery chaos” of spontaneous thought has been overwritten by a neatly ordered, number –based (or in Hulme’s words, “counter-based”) system. Hulme states Bergson’s theories on the mind in terms of the metropolis; in other words, Hulme conflates mind and metropolis. I hope to devise the means for a poetical analysis in which the qualitative experience Bergson advocates, while resembling the Symbolist experience detailed by Symons, animates the fluctuation of a fragmented city that manifests within the mind. Thus, I would like to propose a shift in the development of poetic practice instigated by Hulme in the early twentieth century away from an aesthetic in which the city is visualised as space to one in which the city comes to occupy a time. In this mode of thought, the spaces of the city come to represent the thought-time of consciousness, not just places names and geographic areas. Chapter five looks in detail at the way verse arranges the metropolitan environment into mental time through optical metaphor and light imagery.

I would like to focus chapter four’s more theoretical take on literary urbanism through a directed analysis in chapter five of the poetic tropes employed by Hulme to generate the “absolutely transforming influence of putting it into definiteness,” the direct correspondence between the area of written verse and the area of the city.<sup>15</sup> For Hulme, the metropolis provides the artist/observer with an ocular counterpart for the written page of the poet. It opens the poet’s consciousness to the visual capacity of thought by stimulating “the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two different things,” which the

poet then attempts to replicate by hinging two visual moments around a sudden optical effect, such as a flash or a spark (29). The chapter then outlines uses of such poetic illumination to delineate a constellation of influence between Hulme, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot. Pound and Eliot follow in Hulme's footsteps in that each uses poetry as a way to express the connection between metropolis and mind, though through rather different methods.

Ezra Pound included Hulme's one collection of poetry within his own collection *Ripostes* in 1912. That year saw a surge of British interest in Bergsonian philosophy, wherein Hulme took centre stage. From October 1911 to 1912 he published an essay series on Bergson in the *New Age* while also lecturing on Bergson in London from November through December. Andrew Thacker sees Hulme's interest in Bergson during these years articulating important trends and attitudes within modernism, especially Ezra Pound's dictum to "Make it New" and the ensuing close attention paid by poets to the very material of language: "reforming, revising, or inventing new linguistic paradigms became crucial to the strategies by which modernism achieved self definition."<sup>16</sup> As friends and collaborators, Pound and Eliot used London to construct different, yet overlapping modernisms. Symons' critique of symbolism in "Christian Trevalga" informs these competing modernisms, in that it signals the split reaction of the urban dweller to the city. Trevalga's failed attempt to maintain a solipsistic life immersed in music informs the Imagists focus upon the mind's interpenetration with outer environment. Pound, following Hulme, wrote short, focused poetry in which the city and the reader's subjective consciousness resonate between alternating lines. In poems like "In a Station of the Metro" (1914), images from the city vibrate and merge into the inner eye of the reader. Eliot, in

contrast, uses the flickering street lamps in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (1917) to poeticise the problematic way in which the city simultaneously satisfies and revokes the human need to comprehend reality through a stable, unifying system. Drawing upon Symons’ valuation of French symbolist Jules Laforgue, Eliot develops a poetic irony to articulate the city’s capacity to express multiple subjectivities simultaneously.

The section also examines how Pound’s and Eliot’s respective poetic identities were shaped by their native United States. Social and professional rejection at the University of Pennsylvania and Wabash College struck a dogmatic streak in Pound’s essay and poetry writing. Though he lauded the city’s shared role with Paris, and New York as a seat of civilisation in the essay *I Gather the Limbs of Osiris* (1912), his flamboyant and dogmatic style would frustrate his friends and lead to eventual removal from London. Eliot, on the other hand, was a successful Harvard academic with a rather practical-minded ethic. While Pound rarely set his art aside to earn a living and condemned traditional education, Eliot submitted a PhD thesis on philosophy, was well educated across Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, but also took up positions as both tutor and bank clerk to pay the bills. His poetry is thus infused with a keen awareness of middle-class commuter culture and more in-depth responses to the state of human consciousness. For Eliot, the city bears out a deeper truth by asserting the essential multiplicity of meaning that arises through the conflict Hulme and Bergson locate between immediate consciousness and spatially-oriented definitions of reality.

In beginning with Baudelaire's reference to a "half-glance" in Poe's *The Man in the Crowd* and ending with Eliot's poetical vision of the city as inherently fragmented, contradictory, and essentially multiplistic in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," this thesis charts the textual and visual practices of the modern urban writer. The works included and analysed each interrogate the ways in which the city is used to communicate and construct forms of social identity and individual consciousness. For Baudelaire this means questioning the way Napoleon III reconstructs Paris as the seat of his Second Empire; for Wilde this means questioning the impact physical penetration of the city has on the physical presentation of the individual. For Symons, this means gauging the poet's ability to achieve a heightened, spiritual state of consciousness by writing the city into verse. Invariably, all the writers in *Literary Urbanism, Visuality and Modernity* arrive at different answers and raise successively more complicated questions specific and peculiar to their own respective urban experiences.

My goal is to gather a group of late nineteenth and early twentieth century artists whose interest in urban modernity sets them apart from the traditions and conventions of their time. Charles Baudelaire's aesthetic innovations, and their inheritance by Swinburne, Wilde, Michael Field, and Symons, are especially important to this task, in that they illuminate the pervading importance of vision to the practices and exigencies of urban writing. The techniques these artists use to see the city unite the physiological processes of ocular sight, the semiotic processes of citing and reading, and the architectural processes of construction into an act of mutual inscription shared between writer and city. Visuality, as it develops from Baudelaire's historical theory of beauty, to Symons' urban ekphrasis, and to Hulme's cinder, provides the medium through which the physical environment and the



textual environment merge within the mind. From here, Hulme, Pound, and Eliot draw upon Symons' suggestive collection *Silhouettes* and use images of light to assess the link between space/time of urban modernity to the poetic mind. Their work culminates a process of evaluative inheritance from which a distinct literary urbanism between late nineteenth century and early twentieth century writers arises.

## Chapter 1: Baudelaire and the Spaces of Parisian Modernity

Published in 1863, Charles Baudelaire's study *The Painter of Modern Life* comments incisively on modernity in Paris, and uses visuality, the fine arts, and the urban environment to articulate its ideas. My specific interest lies in the essay's representation of the viewing practices of the urban observer. The essay first examines visitors to the Louvre moving between galleries. By watching the crowds, Baudelaire is able to extrapolate a pattern common amongst the museum patrons, and thus comment more generally on Parisian society at large. "The world," he begins,

- Even the world of artists, is so full of people who can go to the Louvre, walk rapidly, without so much of a second glance, past rows of very interesting, though secondary, pictures, to come to a rapturous halt in front of a Titian or a Raphael – one of those who has been popularized by the engraver's art. (1)

The crowd's selective movement is significant; Baudelaire is intrigued by the visitors' collective decision to skip over some works and pay rapt attention to others. They submit to what might be called "the cult of the masterpiece," as generated by the circulation of academic materials. Experiencing the Louvre, following Baudelaire's opening observation, is something done second-hand; a person does not experience the museum for him or herself, but according to a predetermined formula. Further, this sets up the essay's critique on city life. The Louvre is a microcosm for the Parisian streets. The crowds in a museum

and in the city regard beauty as they are told to do so, instead of looking on their own terms.

*The Painter of Modern Life* offers an alternative way of interpreting the art world, and in doing so, a way for the individual to see himself and the city on his own terms. The person who follows the advice of museum guidebooks and engraved representations of classical masterpieces, and then goes home assuredly saying “I know my Museum” is gravely mistaken (1). By loving classical works of art and ignoring lesser known ones, the museum goer is limited by what Baudelaire calls “general beauty,” an academic concept of aesthetic works that have “found their places in the dictionary of artists who are worthy to study” (1). The problem with general beauty is that it has been pre-defined, and thus remains solidly grounded in a critical perspective that looks only backward at works that standardise a tradition of antique and classical art. *The Painter of Modern Life* marks a time in which the weaknesses of this general beauty are to be exposed, “when righters of wrong, critics, amateurs, curious enquirers [. . .] declare that Raphael, or Racine, does not contain the whole secret, and that minor poets too have something good, solid and delightful to offer” (1). Also of note is how Baudelaire’s avocation of minor art broadens the scope of a narrow academic tradition within the fine arts to draw a parallel between painting, drawing and literature. Grouping Raphael and Racine together erases the generic distinction between poetic and artistic production. The two are synthesized into a theory of transposition that focuses upon the visual dynamic underlying aesthetic criticism. The modes of paint and pen speak to each other; painting and poetry are both visual arts and this is Baudelaire’s focus.

Baudelaire grounds his theory of the visual arts, in which painting and poetry are mutually inclusive, by considering how the visual relates to time and the urban experience. Indeed, J.A. Hiddleston astutely places Baudelaire as “the most visual of French nineteenth century poets [whose] professed aim was ‘to glorify the cult of images.’”<sup>17</sup> The city, with its surging crowds, frames and structures Baudelaire’s remarks on art displayed in the Louvre and in turn, informs his choice of poetic subjects and imagery in *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler*. By noting museum-goers’ preference for recognised masters like Raphael or Titian he raises several important questions: Is there a difference between looking at a work constructed a century or more ago, and thus worthy of a place in a predetermined history and looking at lesser known, more contemporary works? What is the difference between looking at a representation of the past and a representation of the present? Beautiful things that exist in Paris’ immediate street environment offer an alternative to academic valuations of the past; by approaching aesthetics through his own encounters with the city environment, Baudelaire offers a representation of urban life interested only in contemporary culture. Baudelaire states this premise outright: “My concern today [in *The Painter of Modern Life*] is with the painting of matters of the present [. . .] The pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present is due not only to the beauty which it can be invested, but the essential quality of being present” (1).

Baudelaire isolates an essential connection between the methods used to construct reality and that reality itself. This connection is built upon choice; we can choose to believe the world others have already represented in writing and painting, or we can consider art that presents the world as it appears to us first hand. Considering art in this way gives credence to those particular scenes that would be otherwise overlooked as

accidental, coincidental, or banal. *The Painter of Modern Life* is a look into the world of an artist whose capacity is to investigate the presence of beauty in the events of daily life, and present that beauty on its own terms. Indeed, the world of the museum offers Parisian readers a microcosm through which they might re-examine the city in which they live, to consider whether that world was simply a museum full of predefined artefacts, or a metropolis whose constituent objects arise in relation to the often unplanned actions of living inhabitants.

I do not mean to say that Baudelaire would have his readers choose exclusively between the world of the past and the world of the present. Rather, I would like to consider how Baudelaire's essay shows a way in which the scenes of Paris reveal how the past and the present interpenetrate to form a peculiarly "modern" reality. One sort of beauty is not meant to be chosen in favour of another, but rather how the two together provide a more complete conception of reality and how that reality exists in relation to our interactions with it. In this sense, the past and the present are shaped by the same forces, albeit through different forms and materials. Baudelaire asks us to enquire into the mysterious forces that animate life, hoping "someone will put on a play in which we shall see a resurrection of those costumes in which our fathers found themselves every bit as fascinating as we do ourselves in our poor garments [. . .] Without losing anything of its ghostly attraction, the past will recover the light and movement of life and will become present" (2). By interacting with the city, one can "distil the eternal from the transitory" (12).

Baudelaire, of course, feeds his desire by going on to identify this “someone who will put on a play” as the very real Constantin Guys, who draws and drafts scenes in which the past may be seen as the immediate constituent of the present. Born in Vlissingen, Holland in 1802, Guys attracted attention in 1855 as a correspondent, water colour painter, and illustrator for British periodical *The Illustrated London News* during the Crimean War. He later became notorious for his frank depictions of French street life, his subjects including crowds (“Avenue des Champs Elysees”), prostitutes (“Girls in a Bordello”), and theatre-goers (“Au Balcon”). By the time of his death in Paris in 1892, Guys was admired by the likes of Degas and Monet, and had become the archetype for Baudelaire’s ideal cosmopolitan. The visual aesthetic outlined in his essay on Guys relates poetics to the construction of history and memory in the city. The parity between the visual image and the poetic image allows for a reading of the urban environment in terms of a system of symbols that illuminates the coexistence of the past within the present.

Characterised as “a passionate lover of crowds and incognitos,” Guys exemplifies the observations made by Baudelaire as he stood in the Louvre at the start of *The Painter of Modern Life* (5). And when we learn he is the sort of artist who “in a word [. . .] delights in universal life” it is not at all improper to consider him the sort of artist one would pass over while on the way to viewing grander, idealised works of art like Titian’s portrait, “Man With a Glove” (10). Too commonplace to be masterpieces and too sketchily rendered to be considered a technical triumph in its own time, Guys’ art would easily be found wanting in the critic’s and the academy’s eyes. Even Baudelaire excuses critics for overlooking an artist who “drew like a barbarian, or a child, impatient at the clumsiness of his fingers.” He, who had seen Guys’ “primitive scribbles”, must “own that a majority of

those who are, or claim to be, connoisseurs in the matter, might well be pardoned for failing to discern the latent genius which abode in such murky daubs” (5). By pointing out the discernable weaknesses in Guys’ drawings, Baudelaire gives credence to more widely known and respected artists. He knows the technical quality of Guys’ work pales in comparison to Titian’s portrait; and yet Baudelaire also hints at something peculiar to Guys that makes him an important counterpoint to the Renaissance master.

## **I. Mnemonic Art and Urban Vision**

The contrast between Guys’ sketches, which “draw from memory and not from the model” and more representational work which more strictly replicates nature, like Titian’s still-life portraits, points us towards the processes of Baudelaire’s aesthetic. The artist who draws from memory recollects an earlier image, and thereby brings the past back to life. The slow working still-life artist, however, creates such painstakingly detailed images that they become little more than copies. The representational artist becomes so locked in technical precision that his image loses its essence, the painting loses its life story: “with him everything flashes forth but nothing tells” (17). And yet with mnemonic art, the artist works not with slow, technical precision, but with a frantic haste that bespeaks devotion not to skilful copying, but to an authenticity of sight. The mnemonic draughtsman sketches speedily so that the precarious abyss of oblivion might be avoided. Apprehensive of his own forgetfulness, the artist is sped along by a “fear of not going fast enough, of letting the phantom escape before the synthesis has been extracted and pinned down” produces work that is rather open and sketchy (17). The artist resuscitates a scene so that it retains a life-like fluidity in an image whose loose lines breathe of their own accord.

In this way, Guys draws so that he might evoke an image, not represent it. In avoiding rigidly drawn lines, Guys' drafts fluidly channel living scene into living image. The draughtsman practices a sort of automatic writing whose "orders of the brain may never be perverted by the hesitations of the hand" (17). The artistic imagination is thus cast in *The Painter of Modern Life* as a reflex action through which the work of art is realised without any further input from the artist, and further, the work of art comes into being on the canvas at the very moment of its realisation. The sketches show the image as a falling away of form, with their lines falling away from the central concept they embody.

Guys' works appear of their own accord. The artist is only a channel for the world he sees, and a medium for the impression thus created in his mind. One could conclude that the urban environment manifests on its own terms, literally "drawing itself" through Guys' hands. This urban aesthetic intimately engages the artist with the historical processes driving mnemonic art. By using memory as a way to channel the vitality of the city and recreate the resulting mental picture on the page, Guys parses the artistic subject according to a historical theory of beauty underlying modernity. Just as history is comprised of the co-penetration of the past and the present, beauty is also double in its composition. There is,

an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity is excessively difficult to determine, followed by a second, relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions [. . .]



We have seen these ideas before, presented more cryptically as costumes of the past, which, when reinvigorated by actors, recover the light and movement of life and will become present. (3)

The world thus appears through the human activities that shape the outer environment. Life animates beauty into shapes specific to man while also preserving beauty as something timeless and intangible. This historical theory of beauty destabilises the fixed centre of conventional perception focused upon the direct assimilation of events as they happen here and now. Indeed, beautiful images are only rooted in the present to the extent to which they point backwards to some distant or distanced past. For Baudelaire, selfhood floats across time between provisional, constantly shifting centres. The scenes shaping Baudelaire's work open a way to understand how Paris fashions a poetics that questions conventional, linear representations of time and space. The city works a complex device for psychic mobility and fantasy between times and spaces; thus Baudelaire's poetry is never fully present to itself, instead gesturing continually backward through images and subjects of displacement.<sup>18</sup> By illustrating Guys' artistic practice in *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire offers an important insight for reading his own poetry collections, *The Flowers of Evil* (1862)<sup>19</sup> and *The Parisian Prowler* (1869).<sup>20</sup>

Modernity manifests through the spaces of the city. The chaotic movement of bodies and faces in the passing crowd embodies Baudelaire's aesthetic of fragmented, fleeing images of present-day fashion intertwined amongst more profound elements of eternal beauty. Further, the mnemonic artist is the painter of modern life. Baudelaire so

highly lauds Constantin Guys' sketches for refreshing the vision of "the man who knows his museum" and reviving sketchy living images from the world of the museum artefact. Characterised by a peculiar naïveté and innocence Guys is, "possessed in the highest degree the faculty of keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently the most trivial" (7). He is "the child who sees everything in a state of newness" (8). The painter of modern life is that artist who accepts the difficult task of discovering elements of beauty within the noisy, gritty spaces outside the Louvre and whose work recognises a painterly or poetic world which *sui generis* embraces in the broadest terms a metaphysics of life.<sup>21</sup> In this view, poetry and indeed all modern art was a "suggestive magic containing both object and subject, the world beyond the artist and the artist himself."<sup>22</sup>

Baudelaire praises Guys as a modern artist "who makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory" (12). Focusing on the fashions of the day, footmen, women's fashion, soldiers, carriages, Guys studies how beauty materialises through scenes of social activity. This investigation into the ever-changing modes of human life, the costumes of clothing, habit, and lifestyle, makes beauty truly apparent. Firmly fixing his attention on the immediate events of the present, Guys translates the eternal and immutable element of beauty from contemporary fashion, drawing that ghost from the past which has left the empty shell of old costumes to animate our own. In *The Task of the Translator*, Walter Benjamin provides a theoretical model that considers how artistic translations of reality have a specialised relationship to perceptions and portrayals of history. Benjamin observes that translations

instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognisable as fragments of a greater language just as fragments are part of a vessel.<sup>23</sup>

Understanding translation as a process that reveals all languages as part of a shared whole bears importantly on how one understands Guys' work in relation to modernity and historical aesthetics. The city takes Baudelaire's historical concept of beauty out of the theoretical realm and into the living world. This sort of urban aesthetics describes the city so precisely because it is the city. It is not Guys himself who distils the essence of life from the changing city, rather the city who allows Guys to see its processes so clearly.

Paris translates itself through Guys' capacity to form a mental impression of it and then put that impression on the page. Such translation, the passage of the urban environment into the sensing mind, the mind's rendering of the environment into a mental image, and then the replication of that image onto paper, unites city and city dweller in an act of mutual inscription. The urban environment is as much a revelation as it is revelatory in its own right. Beautiful form, as Baudelaire sees it, originates in the city and reaches the perceiving artist without capitulating to that artist's subjective mind. The impression created, though drawn by Guys, operates according to the city itself. The historical theory of beauty translates itself from the urban environment into the mental processes of the artist, becoming either a picture, or for Baudelaire, an idea. In calling Guys a modern artist, Baudelaire articulates modernity as the way the city translates the transitory forms

and fashions of life and living into the forms and fashions of painting and poetry. In this way, urban aestheticism could be regarded as a practice in which the act of living and the craft write themselves upon one another. The city is written using methods that are, in part, mediated by the city itself.<sup>24</sup>

City crowds provide the very real, very modern environment in which Baudelaire's theories on beauty and artistry play out. Instead of side-stepping minor works of art, crowds step everywhere. Their random movement guides Guys' unselective eye; the artist moves amongst Parisians "a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or [as] a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life, and the flickering grace of all the elements of life" (10). Guys moves in such a way that the faces passing him by grant visual access to the aesthetic spaces of the modern city. His viewing position takes an oblique view of the urban collective and refracts an otherwise scopic vision. Guys' sidelong glance breaks the collective crowd down to the level of the individual and in doing so emphasises personal history over social history. Understanding Baudelaire's historical theory of beauty through this "sidelong" visual economy is crucial to understanding the poetics of *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler*. The poems in these collections develop a visual practice specific to the city, in which the urban environment is presented through instances of oblique vision which reveal the hidden eternal elements of the past lurking beyond the chronological present marked by passing fashions. Thus, the historical aesthetic advocated in *The Painter of Modern Life* and implemented in *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler* illuminates ways in which Parisians encounter fragments of modernity. These texts harness

the potential energy of the crowded and noisy city to reveal discrepancies between memory, reality, and perception that destabilise the geography of the urban environment.

The tension between the lived environment and the built environment haunts Baudelaire's poetics and provides a useful, practical element to his theoretical writings. The fact that large sections of central Paris were levelled as part of city-wide works project during an extended period of Baudelaire's writing vividly illustrates modernity at work. The clearing of inner-city slums and the construction of wide boulevards and bright cafés didn't just modernise the city by bringing it up to date; the demolitions highlighted how fleeting the built human habitat actually is. Buildings can be destroyed, streets can be re-paved, and boroughs can be given an entirely new face. But at the same time, urban re-development leaves behind residual traces of the building site's old face, traces which cling to the new city like dust in static electricity. The metaphysical dynamic of Baudelaire's images, set in motion through the interpenetrating forces of the contingent and the eternal, finds a simple and powerful counterpart in the ways in which bits and pieces of "old Paris" resist the urban development projects underway in Paris in Baudelaire's lifetime. Thus, I would like to spend some time taking direct issue with Paris as it was re-built by Baron Eugène Haussmann at the height of Napoleon III's Second Empire. Doing this, I hope, will provide some useful context for understanding how modernity as a theoretical concept manifests also as a technique, a way of looking that uses oblique vision to translate the broken spaces of Second Empire Paris into the verse forms of Baudelaire's imagined, poetical city.

## II. Paris and the Second Empire

The architectural and spatial changes affecting the French capital during the mid-nineteenth century offer a significant insight into how Baudelaire's poetry is informed by a spatial and temporal dynamic. The physical changes Paris underwent as it rose from a walled city into a planned modern metropolis physically manifest the ideal that the past continually occupies the present. Indeed, the spaces of Paris during Baron Eugène Haussmann's period of massive renovation and reconstruction exemplify the aesthetic city as fragmented and disorganized. With this in mind I have chosen to draw upon Paul-André Touttaint's biography and urban study of Paris during the Second Empire. Touttaint combines personal history with a political and architectural account of Paris' establishment. He does this from street level, noting the infrastructural axes along which the capital rose at its very beginning in the twelfth century, and how the specific locations of cultural landmarks contextualise the city's human element. Touttaint's spatial history provides a unique example of how Parisian built space was used to write a history of transition under Napoleon III.

The construction of the les Halles market centre during the twelfth century under Phillip II and the simultaneous enclosure of the city centre with the first of several *enceintes* - with corners on 29 rue Guenegaud, 3 rue Clovis, and 4 Thouin - sandwiched Paris's main space of social and economic exchange between distinct and rigid infrastructural boundaries.<sup>25</sup> While the *enceintes* provided necessary security against

invading forces, they also fostered insurgent disorder on a smaller, internal scale. The drunks, prostitutes, vagabonds and other *ribaudes* and *ruffians* peppering the district's *rues chaudes* or "hot streets" thrived in the ongoing construction of castle-forts like the Bastille Saint-Antoine. The addition of three more *enceintes* during Philippe IV's reign nurtured the *rue chaudes* by further compacting the neighborhoods around les Halles into a labyrinthine network of shady streets and hidden passages.

The pressure of human activity rose quickly in these crowded spaces. From 1789 to 1851, the Parisian population increased from six hundred thousand to over one million people. With living space rapidly decreasing, increased taxes, and people unable to make rent, domestic life spread from the house into public space. Haine explains how "the proletarian apartment often seemed altogether less like a home and more like an extension of the street, with fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons liv[ing] together in 'pell-mell' fashion."<sup>26</sup> Working class life spilled onto the streets, culminating in what David Garrioch calls in "community space[s] par excellence." This permeable space between home and street in central Paris increased the social distance between poor and more well-to-do residents. The Parisian bourgeoisie willingly de-socialised themselves from the streets. For them, "the street became a passageway rather than a living room" and consequently left to the lower orders.<sup>27</sup> For the well off, the capital had become a series of interconnected interiors bridged by arteries through which one could go, but in which they rarely wanted to be. When the final *enceinte* went up in 1785, inner Paris could no longer bear the continually compounded pressures of confinement.

By 1838 literary work exposed the inner city hidden behind nearly four hundred years of walls, *places*, castles, and cathedrals. Gerard de Nerval in “October Nights” highlights the recent arrival of realism in French literature, while at the same time noting the style’s limitations.<sup>28</sup> The more Nerval’s narrator attempts to master the city through mimesis, the more he inevitably finds himself drifting off into a private fantasy of recollection and desire:

The floor of les Halles is beginning to stir to life. The carts of the various wholesale merchants of dairy products, fish, produce and vegetables were arriving in an uninterrupted stream. The carters who had finished their haul were having drinks in the various nearby all-night cafes and taverns. On the rue Mauconseil, these establishments stretch all the way to the oyster market; they line the rue Monmartre from the edge of Saint – Eustache to the rue du Jour. (220-221)

In this extract we have a first-hand account of les Halles nurturing a realist narrative of the everyday life existing behind the politically motivated structures of the French capital; but then this narrative deviates into a description of drinking establishments and ultimately, drunkenness. So alive is this Parisian market that it has a heady effect on Nerval. The loud streets, the stream of carriage wheels and clip-clopping horses “does the job just as well as absinthe” (220-21). The urban haze floats across the Seine to la Cité, where it condenses into the heavy-headed shadow or urban hangover. Eugène Sue writes in *The Mysteries of Paris* of



That labyrinth of obscure, narrow, and winding streets which extends from the Palais de Justice to Notre Dame. Although limited in space, and carefully watched, this quarter serves as the lurking place, or rendezvous, of a vast number of the very dregs of society, who flock to the tapis-franc. This word, in the slang of theft and murder, signifies a drinking-shop of the lowest class [. . .] Dark and noisome alleys led to staircases still more black and foul, and so perpendicular, that they could hardly be ascended by the help of a cord fixed to the dank and humid walls by holdfasts of iron. Stalls of charcoal sellers, fruit-sellers, or vendors of refuse meat, occupied the ground-floor of some of these wretched abodes. Notwithstanding the small value of their commodities, the front of nearly all these shops were protected by strong bars of iron, - a proof that the shopkeepers knew and dreaded the gentry who infested the vicinity.<sup>29</sup>

Together, Sue and Nerval excavate a Paris lost beneath the shadows of a city built in upon itself. Nerval's heady market square and Nerval's shadowy stalls and street refuse point to what Kristin Ross calls "a non-passive spatiality" in that here the city enacts an agency simply by being present.<sup>30</sup> The spaces of residential life in the les Halles' and la Cité's *rue chaudes* activate a specific form of operations and interactions; time and space within the *enceintes* are separate and exclusive from the political city at large. Further, the microcosm of life within the *enceintes* articulates a disparity between the way working and lower-class Parisians lived the city and the way the city itself would be rebuilt by Haussmann. There is an unresolved tension between organic creation and synthetic fabrication, between the city lived and the city built.<sup>31</sup>

Contrasting the poor's shared life between home, street, and market with the closed world of the bourgeois domestic interior illuminates a sensory discrepancy involving the ways Parisians regarded their city. The bourgeois interior and the working class exterior were conflicting worlds of regimental control and vivifying chaos. For the poor and working class, life on the streets was not just the melee and the mob of the café and the crowd; street life betokened an alternate mode of thought, in which the teeming populace of *le pantin*, the Parisian underbelly, overflow into the streets and the streets, in turn, overflow into the psychology of the city dweller. Lamenting the changing city, its closing quarries and homeless workers, Nerval's "October Nights" imagines a lost world beneath the stones of Paris, a world inhabited by a human psyche of the ancient world:

Unfortunately, all the major quarries have now been closed. There used to be one towards Chateau-Rouge that resembled a Druidic temple with its tall pillars supporting square square-shaped vaults. You looked down into the depths, almost afraid that the awesome gods of our ancestors—Esus, Thoth or Cernunnos—would emerge into view. Today there are only two inhabitable quarries left, over towards Clignancourt. Both of them are filled with workers who sleep there between shifts. Local colour! A thief always knows where to lay his head: the only people they used to arrest in the quarries were respectable vagrants who didn't want to ask for shelter at police stations, or else drunkards who had stumbled down from Montmartre and simply couldn't make it any further. (207)

Building upon these examples, I would like to consider how Baudelaire's poetry splices a city together using scenes in which elements of the Parisian underbelly exert a sense of time and history that countermand the urban development and modernisation plans at work around them. The fragmentary lives persisting despite Haussmann's provide a map for the overlap between the perception of memory and the perception of the immediate external environment which depicts modern life. The drunk, hallucinatory city at work in "October Nights" is an excitatory one. A stimulant drug in and of itself, Paris shapes the way its inhabitants interact with the environment.

Inner city Parisians absorb the city into their system, and in digesting it, they become the agents of a dying world acting out against the expanding borders of Haussmann's new boulevards. In *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler*, Baudelaire portrays urban life through verses that present modernity as a quality peculiar to those lives shaped by the city. His poems both visualise and textualise the city, articulating modernity through images and scenes of humanity's immersion a city's reconstruction. The attempted refashioning of human life attempted under the Second Empire found its means through the physical refashioning of urban infrastructure. Baudelaire's work focuses on the lives caught in the midst of this process; they are the heroes of modern life, expressing modernity through their every day encounters with Haussmann's rebuilt city:

It is impossible not to be gripped by the spectacle of this sickly population which swallows the dust of the factories, breathes in particles of cotton, and lets its tissues

be permeated with white lead, mercury and all the poisons needed for the production of masterpieces [. . .] [It is] this languishing and pining population to whom the earth owes its wonders; who feel a purple and impetuous blood coursing through their veins, and who cast a long, sorrow-laden look at the sunlight and shadows of the great parks. This population is the background against which the outline of the hero stands out. Baudelaire captioned the picture thus presented in his own way. He wrote the words *la modernité* under it.<sup>32</sup>

The urban peasants tied to Paris' walled and ironed streets would come to rub elbows with their well-heeled, bourgeois cousins once Haussmann began renovating Paris in 1863. Haussmann demolished the tight labyrinthine streets of areas like les Halles and la Cité to lay broad, well-lit boulevards followed that rerouted the city into "a single organism, a unit that could be conceptualized, planned as a unified system, and realized through technical, scientific, and mechanical means."<sup>33</sup> Shelley Rice's observation here on the restructuring of an unplanned, chaotic, human landscape into a planned network of surveyable streets implicates Haussmann in a systematic takeover of the public space cultivated by working class residents of the French capital. Following his emperor's mandate to open the old, medieval capital and bring the city up to date, Haussmann's work replaced the condensed working class world with a new, airy, and well lit city centre. The centrifugal force of Haussmann's scheme to expand Paris dispersed the poor across the wide boulevards like the rue de Rivoli and into the margins of mainstream life.

The Parisian crowd, as it developed in the years leading up to and through Haussmann's tenure, provides a crucial first example of how humanity might persist despite the re-engineered Paris. Despite Haussmann's bulldozed capital and its iconic boulevards, planned *urbanisme* could not fully subsume the remaining pieces of the tenements it so readily fractured and the people it so readily re-located to the borderlands of the city. The city drew its inhabitants back into its fold, as individuals and small groups began making their way back into Paris, now remodeled and re-paved with bright, open thoroughfares. The fragmented population of dispossessed and relocated inhabitants of the inner city haunted the newly bourgeois mainstream that emerged from its interiors and into the open, showing us how an individual may be "a fragment whose existence never exceeds the fragment."<sup>34</sup> Rice, for example, notes in her study of Henri Le Secq's photographs of the Tour St. Jacques:

As depicted in the numerous photographs that exist from [the Second Empire], Parisian monuments lose all semblance of stable, community content and begin to splinter into signs [. . .] Le Secq's tower, for instance, is the sad remnant of a passing era [. . .] The shifting position of [the Tour St. Jacques] within the continuum of urban space [. . .] let it become a piece of the always unfinished puzzle that links past to present to future."<sup>35</sup>

If Baudelaire sees the seam along which the pieces of old *rue chaude* life bind to new Paris, then his poetics describes a process in which images of street life translate the aesthetic experience from the theoretical musings on a historical theory of beauty into a

practical and humanly applicable poetics. The heroes of modern life in *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler* work within a system of fragments, thrown away objects, and outcast individuals whose very presence translates Haussmann's city back to its pre-Second Empire origins. Situated amongst the cleared lots of Second Empire Paris, their intrinsic connection to an urban environment, whose dust they have tasted and into whose deep quarries they have peered, conjures images of the past. And these images, as past lives, carry the French capital back and forth across the temporal and physical boundary of modernisation. The crowded city packed with people and the rubble of Haussmann's rebuilding frees the artist from conventional powers of perception. Baudelaire's deepest fascination with the spectacle of modernity lay in the fact that while his vision of the changing face of Paris intoxicated him, it did not free him from the horrible reality that the heart of Paris, both physically and psychically, had been demolished. His poetry remained conscious of the city's past life, though only in the way intoxicated people register reality through a haze. The metropolis had seemingly moved on, and yet a straggling minority from the working class returned to the streets, now a bourgeois paradise, in search of its old life. That is why in Baudelaire's writings the big city almost always finds expression in the direct presentation of its inhabitants, and further, in the ways that presentation harnesses the power released by the discrepancy between the visual practices used by the bourgeois and by the *rue chaude* dweller.

### **III. Reading Paris: *The Parisian Prowler* and *The Flowers of Evil***

Introduced as a "little work of which it cannot be said, without injustice, that it has neither head nor tail, since on the contrary, everything in it is both tail and head, alternatively and reciprocally," *The Parisian Prowler* is a collection of interchanging elements, of paradox,

irony, and accident (129). Its prose poems, though presented in numerical order, are best read at random; the titles are simply reference points and belie a more chaotic poetics. The collection eschews linearity, embracing instead a fluidity which mixes the reader into an imagined reality: “We can stop whenever we want, I my reverie, you the manuscript, the reader his reading; for I do not bind the latter’s recalcitrant will to the endless thread of a superfluous plot” (129). Indeed, uncertainty surrounds all aspects of Baudelaire’s prose-poems. What he wished to achieve, and what he did achieve in experimenting with such a dangerous and hybrid genre [. . .] is by no means evident.<sup>36</sup> Prowling the city places Baudelaire immediately within the processes of modernity, processes in which visuality expresses the discontinuity between the lived and the built, the original Paris and its reconstructed duplicate. “The Eyes of the Poor,” for example, provides an exacting account of a bourgeois trying to reconcile the discrepancy between the boulevard and the ruined city beneath it as he, ironically, sits inside one of the Second Empire’s new street-side cafés. The tale recounts a unique visual moment in which a bourgeois couple meets eyes with a beggar family from across the boulevard. Dazzled by the new café, the family edges to the window where they in turn become a spectacle for the bourgeois and his partner. As this section will show, ocular moments such as these pepper Baudelaire’s writing and expose gaps between life in the constructed forms of Haussmann’s Paris and the unseemly underbelly it tried to exclude. The analyses that follow focus on such moments of visual exchange and articulate a poetical practice in which Baudelaire uses uncouth objects of the city as refractive surfaces to problematise the relationship between man and his habitat.

“To the Reader,” preface - poem to *The Flowers of Evil*, invokes a paradigm in which religious blasphemy becomes an argument for personal freedom. Baudelaire here invokes Satan Trismegistus [Satan Thrice-Great] who “rocks our ravaged spirits on his wicked bed/ until the precious metal of our will / is leached out by this cunning alchemist” to use sin, ironically, an argument for righteousness (9-12). When removed from the Christian-based morality and ideology, the “flowers of evil” the collection presents in its poems reconfigure the decency of human action in direct relation to the circumstances of that action. Their satanic alchemy operates around a poetical conceit that uses morally indecent images to disgust, shame, or embarrass the reader out of conventional ethical systems. By invoking the Anti-Christ, Baudelaire looks to extract “the precious metal of our will” from socially constructed behaviour, and from this render an honest depiction of urban life (11). Satanic scenes of the city invert conventional oppositions and meaningful distinctions between good and evil; Baudelaire’s Satanism putrefies “the banal buckram of our fates,” so “our souls lacking enterprise” might venture beyond the bounds of social stricture (27, 28).

"To The Reader" suggests that humankind could and should take more active responsibility in recognising and subverting the forces which suppress natural desire. Jonathan Culler makes an important point here regarding Baudelaire’s comment on man’s culpability in sin. On the one hand, the devil pulls our strings and if we are to find repugnant objects attractive, then it is his fault; and yet if the banality of our lives has not been decorated by sin, it is because our sins are not bold enough.<sup>37</sup> The hyperbolic call for “rape, arson, poison and the knife” in the seventh stanza bespeaks a giving up of moral self-restraint (25). This violence damages assumptions, not bodies; they reveal images one



would quickly and easily group as horrid, and thus highlight an abounding moral complacency. Crime calls ennui out as its enemy, “this beast [who] would gladly / undermine the earth and swallow all creation in its yawn”; it resurrects consciousness from the stupor of oblivion (35-36).

Paris, “the squalid zoo of vices,” provides a sweep of urban self-reflection in the midst of Haussmannisation. Baudelaire implicates himself in his scathing and satanic take on public morals (32). In invoking the reader, he draws himself out of private critique and into the public arena. The concluding exclamation, “Reader, you know this squeamish monster [Boredom] well / - hypocrite reader, my alias, my twin!” speaks to Baudelaire’s own position not just as a poet, but as a freelance journalist (39-40).

It is worth noting here the print culture out of which Baudelaire writes, in that in “To the Reader” Baudelaire includes himself amongst the “hypocrite readers” and exposes his own position as a hack journalist. In the years up to *The Flowers of Evil*’s first publication in 1857, *reclamés*, stories and bit pieces on urban life, were increasingly popular amongst readers, and as a result brought city writers into heavy demand amongst publishers. By the 1860s, *reclamés* were so common that many papers had specialised in them, shifting from the traditional journal to the *feuilleton* format. Men of letters found themselves able to generate massive revenue parsing the city for stories, writing them up, and selling them to newspapers for a large financial return and quick public recognition.

Baudelaire recognizes his participation in *feuilleton* journalism. Indeed, Walter Benjamin remarks, “He [Baudelaire] frequently compared such a man, and first of all himself, with a whore [. . .] The great introductory poem, ‘Au Lecteur’, presents the poet in the unflattering position of someone who takes cold cash for his confession.”<sup>38</sup> But Baudelaire exposes himself as a hypocritical sell-out to more firmly locate himself in the city of his time. He, just like anyone else, falls prey to the easy routine and morally acceptable fate of earning a living and making a name for oneself. But he recognises that this too is only contingent upon the culture that produces it; writing *feuilletons* is only a fashion of modernity. Thus, by recognising his own hypocritical role in conventional society, Baudelaire contextualises modernity on a personal level, thereby diluting much of the perceived venom of his satanic rant and drawing the reader more closely to his cause.

The self-reflexive ending “To the Reader” provides a useful context for understanding how Baudelaire deploys urban imagery in *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler*. By implicating himself in the market forces of print journalism, he uses the split between one’s internalized self-image and the external identity projected through the city to articulate his historical theory of beauty on a personal level. The three poems I want to examine in detail, “The Eyes of the Poor,” “The Swan,” and “Carrion” are all studies on the visual and temporal transferences at work on conceptions of the self in Second Empire Paris. The essential quality that animates the external fashions and forms of modern reality manifests through the exposure of the varied strains of representation present at once in Haussmann’s engineered city. By zeroing in on images that are part of both the old and new city, and then pulling out again, these verse selections execute an “economy of restriction and expansion [. . .] [They] have a suggestive magic, a restriction of

reference and the power to open up unexpected horizons to the mind of the reader.”<sup>39</sup> The presence of a sleek, well lit, up to date city built around and on top of an old, decrepit, and ruined inner core allows for an economy of visual intersection, an *échange de regards*, between city dwellers before, after, and during Hausmannisation.<sup>40</sup> Baudelaire’s poeticised images of the city are symptomatic of this, and express their modernity through cross-cuttings of city inhabitants’ optical experience.

#### **IV. Writing Paris: Visual Paradigms in Poetical Images**

Poems that confess the linkages between ideal and seemingly unsuitable formations of the city reveal the correspondences (and discrepancies) between lived space and built space. Indeed, this tension comes to the most powerfully in “The Eyes of the Poor,” “Baudelaire’s embracing text on the web of connections embracing figures, ideology and referentiality, a prose poem that mediates on the implications of correspondences.”<sup>41</sup> Set amongst the unfinished demolitions of Napoleon III’s Paris, the poem locates a scene which is “still full of debris and already ostentatiously exhibiting its unfinished splendours” (60). The trappings of a new world have invaded old Paris and ruined it, and yet the narrator’s tone is strikingly ambivalent. Crumbling stone exteriors remain amongst gas lights and sparkling interiors and these coexistent spaces of splendour and demolition fracture the narrative ideology introduced by the glittering café.

On the one hand, the café’s mirrors’ “dazzling white expanses, the gilding of the molding and cornices [. . .] the Hebes and Ganymedes presenting with outstretched hands

the little amphoras of mousse” reference the power of the man-made to overwrite lived history. Through the construction of this café Napoleon III has made his own era. The city has become a space in which time has consumed a subjective vision that holds “all history and all mythology at the hands of gluttony” (60). On the other hand the visible remnants of a discarded past de-stabilise any easy correlation between an engineered world the present reality is meant to create. A trope of unfinished consumption runs through the story, a paradox of selective gluttony that adheres the remnants of a desolated environment to a world where appearance of luxury, wealth, and over-production that denies them.

“The Eyes of the Poor” is a story of hunger; the speaker’s opening lines, “let me tell you why I hate you today” point the reader to a set of unfulfilled promises between lovers, between citizens, and between cities (60). The narrator addresses his partner and the city when they refuse to uphold his vision of the urban environment. Though he and his partner had resolved together to “share all our thoughts and that our two souls would be as one” their pact has already been broken at the story’s opening; thus the story begins at its end point (60). Instead of flowing neatly forward, the story moves backwards and just as the love affair has unraveled before it has even begun, so does world of the newly finished café. There is a temporal mismatch between the conception of events and their execution in reality; what should have happened has been left undone, and the traces of this unfinished future manifest in the street.

Alternating between descriptions of the café and the unfinished boulevard moves the reader back and forth in time. It invokes a superficial veneer of Hellenic myth and

historic continuity within the café only to immediately revoke it; once the reader follows the speaker's sight line through the café window and see what he sees, and remembers that the café opens onto the street and into a pile of rubbish, the illusion of a neat and expansive café has been blown. The ideology promoted by the café interior cannot veil the inconsistency between the historical discourse it promotes and the actual practice of seeing the city. The visual trajectory that first observes the scene from the outside before moving into the café now refracts outwards. The appearance of poor family outside the café's windows breaks double-mirroring effect that gives depth to the café's gaudy interior. Instead of neatly arranging the chaos of *rue chaude* street life into a neat row of eateries, which extend down the boulevard and into the distance, the poetic scene arranges the trajectory of action around a fractured line of sight. The speaker's eye line is challenged by his partner's whining complaint, itself refracted from the sight she sees on the other side of the café window. Meaning triangulates around focal points shared by the speaker, his partner, and the working class family coming dangerously close to their table by the window.<sup>42</sup> When this motley crew appears from across the street, the narrator disdainfully dismisses their appearance at pure face value: "Everyone in tatters" (61). The speaker's attitude, however, bespeaks his frustration with the split in visual perspective occurring across his table and across the café window. His partner distracts him; the family spots him in the window. These alternate focal points block what should be a privileged, unobstructed view of the street outside, but they more importantly undermine the speaker's visual dominance over the poetic scene. The family's tattered clothes and longing eyes refute the speaker's valuation of them by accentuating the invisible line between the mainstream and the margin, the disenfranchised past and Paris' new future. The family, paradoxically, is and is not what the man says they are. Their almost random arrival shadows the opening vision of the new, sparkling, gas lit café while highlighting the

uncleared rubble of the site's rebuild. The broken promise that opens the prose-poem fragments; not only does the temporal narrative trajectory continue to move backward in time, but diverges away from the narrator and into the control of marginal characters.

The visual perspective shifts from the speaker's interior sight line to the exterior view the ragged family share as they look from the street into the café. The resulting change widens the scope of the text so that the economy of consumption controlling it is revealed as selective. While the original narrator looks at the sumptuous café interior and finds "all history and all mythology at the command of gluttony" the family's reaction to the café reverses this dynamic:

The father's eyes were saying, 'How beautiful! How beautiful! All the world's gold seems to have fallen upon these walls.' – The little boy's eyes, 'How beautiful! How beautiful! But only people not like us can enter this house.' As for the eyes of the smallest, they were too hypnotized to express anything other than stupefied and deep joy. (61)

Such observation reveals the earlier description of the glittering café as one constructed through exclusion. The walls are shiny white because no one can touch them; the gilding glitters because these unseemly customers cannot afford to enter. The exclusion builds sequentially through the father's, the son's, and the infant's successive reactions. First, the father sees the images of Hebes and Ganymedes as a space to which he could return; he still has a claim to the grubby street whose stones under lay the café and the boulevard.

The young boy, however, sees his home street but only as it lies behind the conspicuous barrier of wealth and class. The shiny café interior cuts off the actual physical access his eye can only trace. The syntax of his response, “only people not like us can enter” splits Paris between the places one can see and the places one can go (61). It is unacceptable for this family of paupers to go inside the café. However, the boy’s response to his father, when rejoined by the lady’s remark, ““I can’t stand those people with their eyes wide open like entrance gates! Can’t you ask the headwaiter to send them away?”” opens another possible trajectory (61). The woman’s fearful recognition of the youngest child’s “eyes open like entrance gates” points to the possibility that she and her partner might come into contact with a subject that will ruin their association with the opulent café and the artificial future it symbolizes.<sup>43</sup> “The family of eyes” not only reveals the visual discrepancy between the café interior the street outside, but also initiates a visual trajectory that orientates around these spaces and eventually synchronises them.

The narrator cannot do as his woman wishes; in fact her request results in his disdain for her from the outset of the poem. Her comment forces him to give credence to the disruption caused by arrival of the poor family. The pledge revoked at the start of the prose poem creates an unfulfilled expectation of its realisation that carries through the narrator’s subsequent visual encounters.<sup>44</sup> In seeing the family in the light of the café he feels “a little ashamed of our glasses and decanters, larger than our thirst” and knows he must come to terms with a reality he cannot control, a reality that spills across the arbitrary boundaries by the café (61). The narrator hates his lover because she makes it impossible for him to ignore the undesirables he sees through the window. She desperately wants them sent away, and yet her mention of them accentuates the hard truth that they

must be present and cannot be extricated, covered up, or rubbed out. The poor family's youngest child sees the café and immediately passes into a serene, contemplative happiness. His convalescent mind is taken into another mode of thought, a past for which the Second Empire cannot account. The economy of broken promises follows through; the Paris the baby sees accentuates an unstable process of transition in which Haussmann concedes to the margins of society. The city reconciles itself with its lived elements. The poem ends with all eyes on a café in the street, not the machined boulevard.

“The Eyes of the Poor” demonstrates a constructed reality desperately trying to obscure the traces of its original past by consciously building over it. This process of physical obliteration and reconstruction fails because it cannot incorporate the real fabric of the city into its contrived aesthetic. The organic elements animating the city as a habitable space are left in the shadow of spectacular new buildings, and as a result these new spaces are haunted by the presence of past lives. Baudelaire visualises this process through the café, which serves as an ocular reference point for recognising two versions of Paris. This first version is created in the first lines of the poem as the narrator desperately tries to associate Haussmann's Paris with the ideal love he imagines for himself and his female companion. His ideal has already failed however, and through an account of this unraveling we see the city come undone from the inside out. Thus, while Friedman argues “in the text, the eyes of the poor family seem to exemplify a mimetic language and an ideology that are non-problematic,” she misplaces her emphasis.<sup>45</sup> The narrative language of the prose poem articulates the problematic placement of both the café and the narrator together. The speaker sits in the café, which itself sits within the larger built environment in which the poor family directly stands. They are all together implicated by their spatial



environment, which, visually speaking, is all open “like entrance gates.” Though the narrator translates the poor family’s visual description of the café, he can only do so through paradox. This enables the family to speak on their own terms despite using the narrator’s voice. The tattered family that emerges from the debris of the new café aestheticises the city’s modernity. They trace the ragged edge that fails to complete the ostentatious, internally limited perspective of the café. Their gaze disintegrates the forms of fashion and points to another, underlying reality. The family forces the narrator to engage the city through a vision that expands to include the entire city, not just the one Haussmann is trying to construct. The materials of the city animate the textual poetics written about them; they retain their own agency despite the presence of a narrator or writer. “The Eyes of the Poor” demonstrates a unique visual dynamic that translates the Parisian experience into verse; and it is this visual translation that accounts for the active historical economies present during the Second Empire.

Like “The Eyes of the Poor,” “The Swan” is set directly amongst the remains of a demolition site. Its speaker evocatively traces the effects of oblique vision and provides an image of the city that articulates the processes of poetic production in relation to both the individual in the city and the city itself.<sup>46</sup> “The Swan” is the product of Baudelaire’s power to see the Place du Carrousel in a bifocal vision. The poem relates not only the speaker’s intimate connection with his poetic subject, but also how through that connection the speaker is drawn into a larger system of representation. Through “The Swan” Baudelaire enters urban discourse; instead of writing about the city, he writes the city (or rather, it writes itself through him).

Memory, as a poetic conceit, resonates between “The Eyes of the Poor” and “The Swan”. For both, poetic production is informed by their subjects’ ability to remember. Just as “The Eyes of the Poor” uses sight to evoke and enact a memory of pre-Haussmann Paris, the most striking feature of “The Swan” is its process of recollection; its manipulation of the present perceptual experience to suggest a remembered past and bring the two into continuity within the imagination. F.W. Leakey has strongly argued that “The Swan” does this by overcoming the limitations of *rearrangement*:

In most, perhaps all previously written poems, including those by Baudelaire himself, what is finally presented to the reader is the *rearrangement* in some way (logical or chronological) of the original ideas, the original experience, from which the poem is fashioned; almost by definition there is a gap, more or less wide, between the sequence of ideas and the rearranged sequence ultimately laid before the reader. Baudelaire’s unusual achievement and innovation in [“The Swan”] “Le Cygne” is to have closed this gap, to have made a poem simply by setting down thoughts that came freely into his mind at the moment of composition.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, memory is evoked at the moment of its inception in the mind and relayed to the reader as it appears presently to the speaker. When Andromache is invoked at the start of the poem, her position moves out of memory and into a conscious association with what appears immediately before the speaker. She becomes a reference point for the forward movement of the poem and activates Baudelaire’s awareness as he enters the newly transformed Place du Carrousel facing the Louvre. Like the café in “The Eyes of the

Poor,” the Place du Carrousel is a site of Second Empire reconstruction, only here in “The Swan” the reconstruction is complete and all physical traces of the old market have been cleared away.

Though now an empty space, the Place is replete with associative meaning drawn from its stark absence of activity. Through an opening apostrophe to Andromache (“Andromach, I think of you!”) the site is doubled and appears in a two-in-one fashion (1). Exiled from Troy after the death of Hector, Andromache wept over her dead husband above an empty tomb that she had built on the shore of an artificial River Simois in order to be reminded of the original Simois flowing through her native city. The speaker, like Andromache, finds himself an exiled from his native city in the rebuilt Paris. The poem, in turn, is a tomb to the Paris which has been swept away and to which the speaker can never physically return. But by invoking Andromach as his muse, the speaker initiates an imaginative return his Paris of old. The process of writing entails a process of recollecting, and this sustains the old Carrousel as a fertile memory.<sup>48</sup> Through his muse, the speaker recalls the old Carousel into the present, his conscious memory flowing outward through his mind’s eye just as Andromache grief flows through her tears’ imagined River Simois:

Andromache, I think of you! That stream,  
the sometime witness to your widowhood’s  
enormous majesty of mourning – that  
mimic Simois salted by your tears

suddenly inundates my memory  
as I cross the new Place du Carrousel.  
Old Paris is gone (no human heart changes  
half so fast as a city's face)  
  
and only in my mind's eye can I see  
the junk laid out to glitter in the booths  
among weeds and splintered capitals  
blocks of marble blackened by the mud. (1-12)

The remembered Paris appears as an impression stimulated through present action. Not only does invoking Andromache verbally link the old Carrousel to the new, but the speaker's actual footsteps tie physical action to present perception. Walking through the Place du Carrousel brings the past across the mental barrier of memory. Instead of fading away, the impression inundates his consciousness, becoming present once again. The speaker underestimates himself in the second stanza, for there is no real discrepancy between his mind's eye and his human heart. He need not limit the vision to his mind, since the old Paris conjured in the second stanza sustains itself in the third. The bracketed section in lines seven and eight not only qualifies the phrase preceding it, but also undermines it.<sup>49</sup> Baudelaire does see the old city appear before him; his heart is indeed capable of grounding the site of the Carrousel in its former incarnation.

This doubling of old Paris with new Paris centres upon the poem's titular swan, which is both a condensation of the speaker's memory and an actual object in physical environment of the razed Carrousel. The temporal effect of the speaker's vision weighs heavily on the bird. The swan's actions, though delivered in the past tense of the poem, unfurl a new present that surrounds speaker as he sees and reads the city:

There used to be a poultry market here,  
and one cold morning – with the sky swept clean,  
the ground, too, swept by the garbage-men who raised  
clouds of soot in the icy air – I saw (13-16)

The speaker summons this impression by walking through the Carrousel; the memory is interspersed with adjectives that evoke what he sees now alongside actions described in the past tense of memory: line thirteen begins with “used” and ends in “here,” commas in line fifteen break the action between the “ground” swept by garbage men while a line break separates “raised” from “clouds of soot in the icy air.” These lines have the space of the Carrousel frame both the past memory and the space in which it appears now to the speaker. It is as if two presents occur at the same time. Walking allows the speaker to reach back into memory and project back into the Carrousel, allowing him to see objects in two spaces and times simultaneously.

Writing in the Carrousel leaves the speaker open to the agency of the Second Empire site. Like the narrator in “The Eyes of the Poor,” the speaker in “The Swan” loses

control of his text. Instead of writing about the city, the city writes through both of them. The swan's arrival crystallises this layered internal-external impression. It condenses the spatial reality around an image of being, namely an animal frustrated by its inability to match the world it expects with the world that actually is:

a swan that had broken out of its cage,  
webbed feet clumsy on the cobblestones,  
white feathers dragging in the uneven ruts,  
and obstinately pecking at drains

drenching its enormous wings in filth  
as if in its own lovely lake, crying

'Where is the thunder, when will it rain?' (17-29)

The swan animates the speaker's memory, acting out the scene from its own first-person perspective. It defiantly pecks at a ground it knows holds no seeds and drags its body through dust that would serve it better were it water. When the swan cries out, its voice transforms the image the speaker sees of a swan deprived of water to a swan actively defying the reality around it. The speaker and the swan merge through the bodily movement of the swimming in dust, which the speaker vicariously experiences through the ocular action which creates the versified field of vision. The cry is not a lament, rather a cry of impatient expectation and even rebellion. The rain and thunder need to come; the swan's existence demands it. The tone here is diabolical, looking back to "To The Reader"

at the collection's very start; the swan is not a symbol of evil, but an agent or personification whose ability to act is essential.<sup>50</sup> The swan acts on its own initiative and cuts the Carrousel's referential link with Haussmann's controlled urban system. The speaker no longer associates the swan via the city it is in, but by the city it is.

The speaker's powers of memory condense the larger space of the Carrousel into a self-aware image with independent faculties of thought, speech, and movement, indicating a key change in city as a visual field. "I see it still, inevitable myth," continues the speaker and the external reality of the Carrousel falls away and the Parisian backdrop morphs into a "sky quite blue and blank and unconcerned" (24, 26). The swan's refusal to submit to external reality arrests the flow of time within the poem. The figurative representation of memory shifts into an allegorical reality in which past and present are continuous. Part II of the poem begins "Paris changes" and yet the speaker admits that the new world created by Haussmann is empty; only memory sustains him, "weigh[ing] more than stone" and providing a more stable firmament than the Carrousel itself (32).

All that remains is a swan standing out from gallery of images. The swan left defiantly flapping outside the Louvre returns us to the "man who knows his museum" Baudelaire uses to introduce *The Painter of Modern Life*'s interest in overlooked images. This Parisian scene from *The Flowers Evil* extends the practice of sketching from memory into a direct engagement with external reality. Instead of drafting a recollected picture, the poet in "The Swan" uses his verses so as to create a visual impression that brings memory into the immediacy of the present. Further, the evocation of memory in direct contact with

the urban allows mere reminiscence to gain the power of action. The poet holds more than an aesthetic knowledge of the fleeting forms costuming an ever-present metaphysical reality; he allows that sublime potential to shine out from the city he sees. His visual awareness dilates to hold experiences of the outer environment and his internal consciousness within the same frame. The expansion brings the past into the realm of present, where it comes into higher fidelity and focus. Then, through a power all its own, the vision that was once memory becomes active on its own terms, its agency localized into a single image, like a swan demanding water in a desolated and dusty square. This image, crystallized from memory and embedded into external reality, alters the patterning of perception. The swan is an exile cut off from the conventional sensory relay of reality. But this exile also sustains itself through the practice of urban writing, which sublimates the speaker's imagined and remembered experience into an alternate reality.

When the man in the crowd recognises the material of city life through his oblique vision, he experiences a sensory revelation of that material object unfolding within the city.<sup>51</sup> "Carrion" presents this unfolding through the poetic resolution of rotting meat's sensual repugnance with dead flesh's fecund potential. The speaker describes the carcass on the street as "hideous carrion-/legs in the air, like a whore displayed, / indifferent to the last" thus indentifying the point from which the city's multiple representations will expose themselves. In this sense, the city image seems like a subordinate sexual object willing to accept whatever associations those passing by wish to give it (4-6). This fleshy, rotting animal, however, flaunts itself before the speaker. She does not care about what is said about her dead body, and further, she initiates a crisis of representation as the speaker beholds her and speaks about her.



In the lines that follow, a split in poetic register opens around the fleshy display; the display of dead flesh is illuminated from two separate centres: the poet's gut reaction, addressed as "my soul" in the very first line of the poem and "the sun that lit up that rottenness," as mentioned in the opening of stanza three. Significantly, the speaker cedes his ocular ability to the sun. What he sees with his eyes is secondary to the sun's direct effect on the flesh as it shines down "as though to roast it through" (10). Such heated illumination burns through the corpse's superficial identity as dead flesh to reveal a new poetic object hidden underneath. The "splendid corpse, / like a flower opened wide" blooms despite the speaker's nauseous reaction to it (13-14). Speaking to himself he admits, "you nearly fainted dead away / at the perfume it [the carcass] gave off" and thus recognises a split between the world he sees and the environment lit from within by the sun (15-16). The speaker shifts his visceral reaction to the putrid flesh, as seen in his eye and felt in his gut, to a scene which he merely spectates. He watches buzzing flies invigorate the carrion and give it a sort of second life. The flesh not only twitches, but also gives birth. The "gleaming clot / of maggots pour[ing] to finish off / what scraps of flesh remain" in stanza five act enact the city's innate power of inscription over its own elements. The carcass draws new life from the urban environment even as it lies dead in the street.

The transition between an anatomically sensed image and the urban scene in which life arises from death arrives through the poetical layering of visual, olfactory, and aural sensation. The speaker's relation of how the corpse "bubbles up afresh" anatomically shifts into a synaesthetic reverie in which visual elements are imagined into "a curious music

there - / like running water, or wind, / or the rattle of chaff the winnower / loosens in his fan” (22, 26-28). The initial stench of carcass summons up a heady reverie that overrides the speaker’s retching gut, and a disgusting object is replaced by a scene of cycling and recycling of sensations. The sunlit city street, like the winnower rattling his chaff, separates itself into a spectrum of interpenetrating layers of physical form and imaginative content. The image of maggots emerging from dead flesh indicates an inevitable and irrevocable cycle of transference from the urban poet to the city.

The doubled poetic presentation of carrion as dead flesh and of carrion as fertility occurs through a reciprocal process of self-illumination. The speaker sees not only the flower and the flesh, but the marriage of these two images within the same optical field. They dovetail with one another, retained in the speaker’s awareness of the co-existent transient and eternal elements. The falling away of rotting flesh exposes a metaphysical power of rebirth and resurrection exuding from within the city itself. The form of the body dies but the fundamental nature of being remains. “I’ve kept the essences,” the speaker exclaims in the poem’s penultimate line (47). “Carrion,” alternating between disintegration and germination, sustains the essence of modern beauty through an image of decay. Fashionable form passes away, revealing an essence that passes into new birth.

What does a decaying body in a city say about the city itself? The metaphysical potential that arises through a rotting carcass provides the crucial concepts for understanding how the city itself undergoes a process of putrification and renewal that drives the aesthetic transformation undergone in “Carrion.” The essences Baudelaire

identifies seem to sustain the city despite any moral investment done by those within it. The piece of flesh, for example, speaks through the poet and thus stakes its own claim on the environment of which it is a part. In refocusing our attentions to the larger Parisian environment we must also adjust our critical concerns from the aesthetics of one object as it appears in memory to the larger historical frame that informs that memorial experience. How the maggots in “Carrion” act out the city’s power of inscription on the micro level are complicated by when the city is encountered on a full-scale, macro level. The complications however, are not irresolvable. In fact, they provide the larger context needed to fully grasping just how Paris works in Baudelaire’s poetics.

The images in Baudelaire’s Paris signal a recurring trait in late nineteenth century poetics; a trait in which the writing practice becomes a medium between the separation of human self-consciousness from the objects of the material world. Poetry, for Baudelaire becomes a way to restore the lost unity between human kind and the environment. *The Flowers of Evil* subordinates the agency of man as observer, writer, and builder to forces latent in the city itself. The poems deploy grotesque imagery in a way that undermines codified and stereotypical responses to less salubrious aspects of urban life. While Paul De Man argues that Baudelaire expresses unity only in terms of death, it is worth noting that Baudelaire speaks of the death of the judging mind; death bespeaks only a greater potential for human consciousness, not the end of it. Thus when we consider the almost brutal honesty with which Baudelaire depicts humanity in the city, we should not feel that, as De Man says:

The only human experience which offers a symbolical correspondence [for Baudelaire] with unity is that of death [. . .] That the most powerful of human desires, the desire for unity should have to be stated in terms deriving from the most dreaded of all experiences, is a supreme paradox which is bound to introduce an almost unbearable tension.<sup>52</sup>

Morbidity, I contend, when staged as a poem on the paved stones of Paris, uses the mind's eye, the visual seat of human physiological sensibility, to instigate change and exchange. The economy between maggots, flies, and flesh allows for a heightened consciousness to manifest in the mind of the speaker. This consciousness, though split from the judging mind which retches at rot and stink, still draws from the mind's capacity to work with the energies of synaesthesia when they arrive from within the overall singularity of the urban environment.

The poor family, the swan, and the rotting animal are all visual symbols that translate the city by defying conventional experiences of sense and memory. They break free from the ideological assumption that man has complete control over his environment; each enacts a visual agency of their own over the city resident. The Satanism opening *The Flowers of Evil* brings about the effects produced by a symbolism which our grammars may or may not personify: history, classes, and freedom especially.<sup>53</sup> These symbols lie on the fringes of acceptable language, exiles from standard codes and identifiers. They are exiles from purely empirical reality and signpost the way to alternate ways for viewing, understanding, and imagining the urban environment. "The Eyes of the Poor," "The

Swan,” and “Carrion” all exemplify a visual modernity that resists and deflects the modes of perception Napoleon III tries to enforce upon Paris. Instead of looking straight down a boulevard, across a carousel, or past a rotting animal, Baudelaire’s speakers gaze in a way that cross-cuts the hegemony of a full on, frontal view that extends along a straight trajectory. All see a city refracted through multiple spaces and multiple histories. The residents of the old *rues chaudes* materialise alongside visions of neat and splendid cafes, bulldozed sites, and putrid dead bodies. The man of the crowd goes on walkabout in *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler*. His oblique vision spreads through the urban scene, catching sidelong glances of the old, eternal, organic objects of the city that have been replaced by new politics and new technology. Instead of seeing one singular image, Baudelaire’s verses translate the double image of an aesthetic object as it transitions through the forces of modernity, from one fashion to another. The city reveals itself as synergistic, despite the superficial focal points Napoleon III uses to organise it in a neat, singular system.

Baudelaire’s visual modernity, as will be shown in the following chapter, profoundly influences the developing Aesthetic movement in England. Baudelaire’s reception and introduction to English readers by Algernon Charles Swinburne in 1862 continues the urban aestheticism developed in Paris, only now reworking and reapplying it in relation to the dynamics of English life. Swinburne’s controversial, yet undeniably genius work in *Poems and Ballads* series (1868) and “Ave Atque Vale,” his elegy for Baudelaire, translates *The Painter of Modern Life*’s historical theory of beauty through the violent modernity of Sapphic poetry, and into England. The way in which Swinburne navigates through the internal geography of Sapphic poetry lays the groundwork for visual

modernity worked out within the spatial representations of the city created via poetry and fine arts.

## Chapter Two: Whistler, Manet, and Swinburne: Translating Baudelairean Modernity into England

In 1862 Algernon Charles Swinburne published a review of the second and definitive edition of *The Flowers of Evil* in *The Spectator*.<sup>54</sup> Swinburne's remarks in the essay make a poignant distinction between poetry written *of* an age and poetry written *for* an age. Swinburne, considering the latter a stereotype of French verse, laments that instead of working in tandem with the cultural dynamic of the time, contemporary artists have sacrificed the quality of their work for a philanthropic duty to society and to the state. The poet's work must support dominant and officially endorsed cultural mores; he must "break off, on occasion in the middle of his proper work to shove forward some theory of progress," and thereby redeem society through a dramatic and positive reflection of its improvements (27). Art, it seems, has come to a turning point. Artists confront a difficult choice regarding how their art ought to represent the world around them, and the potential ideological implications of those representations. "Critical students," Swinburne continues, "Judging by the books they praise and the advice they proffer, seem to have pretty well forgotten that the poet's business is to write good verse and by no means redeem the age and remould society" (27). This remark alludes to the fact that something has gone wrong with "the age" and with "society," as the two are in a position for some sort of exoneration for some sort of ill, and must therefore be made better. It is as if the relationship between art and the world it represents has come to a turning point, with a kind of scepticism, or at least unsureness, as to the nature of representation in art.<sup>55</sup>

These lines, printed in “Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*” take issue with a major reconsideration of perception as a means of interpreting reality. Not only do they reflect the practices and procedures implemented in the 1862 edition of *The Flowers of Evil* and then elucidated one year later in Baudelaire’s essay on Constantin Guys, *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), but also a wider aesthetic concern shared by members of the Parisian artistic community. Manet, Whistler, and Swinburne all developed concepts of artistic modernity borne in part by Haussmann’s renovation of the French capital. Swinburne, the English Francophile with a French grandfather, played an especially important role in using the Parisian aestheticism of this period to consider London’s development in an increasingly scientific and empirical age. My first task then in this chapter will be to show how Swinburne’s article reflects artistic concepts developed during the Second Empire and thus provides a useful way to frame a discussion of how these artists, as a collective, used images of and about the city to develop a concept of modernity.

The correlation Baudelaire draws between literature and the visual arts lays the foundation for conceptions of metropolitan modernity. The metaphorical “man in the museum” that opens *The Painter of Modern Life* is a guiding figure for artists regardless of national affiliation. This figure, a person willing to leave guidebooks behind and meander through a gallery at will, personifies not only the development of modernity as a visual practice, but also the spread of that practice through the art world. Swinburne’s praise for “The courage and sense of a man who [. . .] ventures to profess and act on the conviction that the art of poetry has absolutely nothing to do with didactic matter at all,” strongly echoes Baudelaire’s endorsement of Constantin Guys as an observer concerned with the



particular beauty “of circumstance and the sketch of manners” (Swinburne 28, Baudelaire 13). Art, for both writers, has to do with the circumstances of the artistic encounter in everyday life. Swinburne’s comments against didacticism in *The Spectator* signals the rising interest in Parisian and English art circles alike for depicting images of day-to-day society in their own time. The metaphorical man in the museum is a very real artist in the city and an artist circulating between two capitals. Baudelaire was as well regarded for his art criticism as he was for his poetry and included the American expatriate (and later London resident), James Abbott McNeill Whistler in his review of the Salon of 1859.<sup>56</sup> On 10 October 1863 Swinburne sent a copy of his review of *The Flowers of Evil* to Baudelaire himself, and though Baudelaire was too ill to read it immediately, he did so once Whistler reminded him.<sup>57</sup> Five months later Swinburne went to Paris and met Manet and Henri Fantin - Latour through their mutual friendship with Whistler, with whom Swinburne then visited the Louvre where he composed “Hermaphroditus.”<sup>58</sup> This composition was almost certainly informed by Baudelaire’s opening metaphor in *The Painter of Modern Life*, which had made print that same year; Delau of Soho Square, Swinburne’s bookseller had already been given a standing order, “to send the next volume of Baudelaire’s works whenever it appears.”<sup>59</sup> Whistler cut his teeth as a copyist of French masterpieces in the Louvre and was still friendly with Edouard Manet when that artist etched Baudelaire’s portrait and exhibited his landmark modernist painting *Olympia* for the Paris Salon of 1865.<sup>60</sup>

The friendly correspondence passing between these artists and the works produced in the context of their shared letters direct Baudelaire’s metaphorical museum-goer to a very real transition regarding artistic choice. Visual artists like Manet and Whistler, and

poets like Baudelaire and Swinburne, who observed, and then painted or wrote about the realities of daily life problematically challenged Haussmann's architectural designs and the discourse they imposed on the metropolis. Just as Baudelaire hails Constantin Guys as the convalescent willing to see everything as if it were in a state of newness, Swinburne's essay "Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*" honours the artist unwilling to accept reality *sui generis*. It defends the artist's ability to render alternate representations of the city through the force of his impressions (7, 16). It also exemplifies Swinburne's awareness of the Second Empire as a period of artistic transition. This awareness in turn highlights Paris' existence as a rebuilt city that must be read, inferred, or imagined by the *flâneur*, whose walks and observations "discover alternate geographies within the metropolis," presumably infinite versions of how the shared streets and buildings delineated senses of placement and identity.<sup>61</sup> Such a painter or poet who rejects didacticism and considers alternate visions of the city, in Swinburne's words, "is proof enough of the wise and serious manner in which he is likely to handle the materials of his art" (27).

*Flânerie*, French for strolling, and *dérive*, French for drift or wandering, provide a useful paradigm for understanding the urban artist and his interactions with the city. They show us how artists responded to a massive internal extension of the capitalist market, the invasion and restructuring of whole areas of free time, private life, leisure, and expression under Napoleon III. The implications of *flânerie* are twofold, in that the term describes both a person and a practice. The *flâneur* strolls through the city, sensing the city according to his whims and arbitrary movements. Such walking drifts, or *dérives* the *flâneur* through the city. A person *en dérive* thus participates in *flânerie*, which characterises the joint actions between an artist observing everyday scenes of Parisian life

and the urban walker who moves according to the organic forces of the city drawing him along.<sup>62</sup> The independent walker was fashioned into a type in pamphlets like Louis Huart's *Physiologie du flâneur*, which excluded the *dérive* to make the *flâneur* out as a loafer uninterested in the spectacles the city had to offer, a deviant in the bourgeois culture emerging from the boulevards and street side cafes, the shopping arcades, front window displays and advertisements.<sup>63</sup> Yet for many artists, the *flâneur* was the hero of the new "modern" life, an observer who manoeuvred through "the pageant of fashionable life and the thousands of floating existences – criminals and kept women which drift about in the underworld of a great city."<sup>64</sup> The *flâneur*, like "the man in the museum" notices the marginal existence of the prostitute, that despised woman who sells herself

in an atmosphere of the marvellous, amongst those official images which bring official success to a majority of artists: The nude—that darling of the artists, that necessary element of success—is just as frequent and necessary today as it was in the life of the ancients; in bed, for example, or in the bath, or in the anatomy theatre.<sup>65</sup>

Baudelaire recognises the body in the city as a sort of double image. The nude exposes an official body of public medical knowledge also beckoning to the artist from a concealed, independent private life in the bedroom and bathroom. While the telescopic vision of an anatomist focuses solely on organs displayed on the operating table, the *flâneur* is instead encompassed by his field of vision; their reciprocity is complete.<sup>66</sup> The *flâneur* is

observed while observing, and seeks transcendence out of the empirical experience into the private space the urban image inhabits on its own.

Some critics go so far as to grant the urban walker a good deal of visual control over the city. The disengagement from commodity culture that differentiates the *flâneur* from the rest of the crowd is perceived not just as conscious choice but as a means of surveillance. The walker's vision becomes all encompassing and Baudelaire's *flâneur* in the end turns out curiously to be a kind of perambulating panopticon.<sup>67</sup> These arguments draw mainly from Walter Benjamin's critique *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1969) in which Baudelaire "goes to the marketplace a *flâneur*, supposedly to look at it, but in reality to find a buyer" or that "while the *flâneur* is presented as a native of his locality, he is actually an individual caught in the act of attempting to regain and keep his native's mastery of his environment."<sup>68</sup> Clearly, the exploration of metropolitan modernity, with its myriad cross-cutting interactions, its fleeting impressions and all that which Baudelaire signified as "the transitory, the fleeting and the fortuitous," posed problems for artists, writers, and critical investigators alike. However, David Frisby pointedly notes how Benjamin's work in the *Arcades Project* (1927-1940) offers a solution, not in recognising the *flâneur* as a writer of a text on the city, but as a writer of texts *as* the city:

In order to be able to see things in their hardly still remembered significance, the flâneur had to wrest the details from out of their original context. To read them means to produce new constructions, means to derive more meaning from them than they possessed in their own present. That which is written is like a city, to which the words are a thousand gateways.<sup>69</sup>

For this reason, the *flâneur*, as a literary and visual artist, has the potential to observe the city according to its own organic parameters as much he might himself observe those parameters that have been placed upon him as a city inhabitant. Georg Simmel's writing is especially concerned with capturing how the dynamism of metropolitan modernity works by seeing "its delicate invisible threads" through the "fortuitous fragments of reality." The preface to Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* (1900) uses market forces to put a critical bead on a trajectory that moves toward eschewing discourses controlling knowledge of the city to instead favour the possibility of finding in the multifarious details a heterogeneous totality of [urban] meaning.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Simmel's evaluation points back to Baudelaire's initial stance in *The Painter of Modern Life*, in that both consider the art exhibition and the city homologous. Art exhibitions, as a "configuration of the world of things," appear to create an outward unity that belies a more deeply seated "vigorous interaction of mutual contrasts, intensifications, and lack of relatedness."<sup>71</sup> They belong to the symbols of our transitional times.<sup>72</sup>

As I explained in my previous chapter, the historical theory of beauty offered in *The Painter of Modern Life* describes an aesthetic practice through which a transcendent,

eternal element of beauty is deciphered from within transient forms of material life. The city and city life change and yet this change occurs only in our minds. Though Haussmann razes the Place du Carrousel, the poet recovers it by altering the way his perceiving mind sees the city. The city is a text.<sup>73</sup> Though Haussmann changes the city so as to bring it under Napoleon III's regulation, Baudelaire refuses to see the city as some sort of apparatus for administering control. In writing "The Swan" Baudelaire brings the Carrousel back from the dead, his mind remapping the urban environment as a mnemonic response to what he sees. "Charles Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal*" echoes this practice by showing how shifting perceptions articulate the experiential quality of modernity and the artist's ability to represent that experience. The essay emphasises the synaesthetic effects of Baudelaire's urban experience over the physical features of the urban environment itself. Aesthetic perception alone concerns Swinburne, who writes, "the sound of his [Baudelaire's] metres suggests colour and perfume" (29). This synaesthetic invocation allows *Les Fleurs du Mal* to exist as something felt; the original words describing these images fall away while the resulting suggestion is sustained. The transition from auditory to visual to olfactory sensation that Swinburne articulates provides a means for showing how reality exists in relation to our perceptions. The essay provides readers with an accurate representation of the city as something experienced regardless of form, be it poetic line or geographical marker. Swinburne follows in Guys' footsteps and "distil[s] the eternal from the transitory," to leave the texts of geography and poetry behind and bridge the perceptual gap between Parisian and London life.

By providing a précis of my earlier analysis of "The Swan" in conjunction with Swinburne's essay, I hope to have shown how the demolitions undertaken during the

Second Empire provide a powerful example of how the city, as representation, can be written and rewritten, how this can impose itself on the individual, and how writing the city resists totalisation. Michel de Certeau has shown how the mapping of urban space as theoretical “concept city” or *espace propre* is inherently paradoxical.<sup>74</sup> The concept city is both its own space and a pure space: “rational organization,” like the vista-ed Boulevards of Second Empire Paris, “must repress all the physical, mental, and political pollutions that would compromise it.”<sup>75</sup> Yet this is impossible: “Beneath the discourses that ideologies the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate [. . .] they are impossible to administer.”<sup>76</sup> The concept city can never systematise the urban environment in full. One can always walk to dark, unexplored, unaccounted for areas, or move through a town centre in a peculiar way, and thereby yield peculiar visions and perspectives. Similarly, I should reiterate that Swinburne was not the only British author influenced by Baudelaire. Some artists and writers, like Whistler, Wilde, Pater, and Symonds were also certainly aware of him. Moving through the sense perceptions called forth by walking in the city raises the possibility for a complex and multiform English painter of modern life into the British literary imagination.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, *The Painter of Modern Life* envisages only another possible representation of the nineteenth century city. Baudelaire represents a kind of alliance; Swinburne’s essay introduces a representation of modernity in which the “painters of modern life” in Paris and London read the city from images official society would have them disregard: the dandy and the rag picker, the whore and the lesbian.

## **I. Edouard Manet and Eton College**

Reading the *The Flowers of Evil* through Swinburne's reception of Baudelaire highlights those particular artistic associations characteristic of nineteenth century modernity.<sup>78</sup>

Investigating how artists "dwell upon the sides on which nature looks unnatural to make up the stuff and substance of the poetry" helps trace the concurrent influence of Baudelaire's poetical practice in France and England (*Charles Baudelaire* 30). As mentioned earlier, Manet and Whistler played essential roles in facilitating Swinburne's contact with Baudelaire and his work. It is with this in mind that I would like now to discuss how these two artists represent the body, in relation to Swinburne's artistic development.

Manet, according to T.J. Clark in *The Painting of Modern Life* (1984), dealt with modernity in one of its most poignant and familiar, but also difficult aspects in depicting a prostitute in the 1865 painting *Olympia*. The painting, in depicting the whore, re-centred the Second Empire Paris upon a woman formerly confined to the edges of society. Olympia's image bespoke a female who had usurped the redesigned city's focus on leisure and display and seemed to be making the city over for herself. For this, Manet's picture was suspected of revelling in a state of affairs that literally saw Haussmann's Paris as a place of pleasure, particularly visual pleasure, but in a way that saw that pleasure as a source of repression and involved in some sort of lack.<sup>79</sup> The painting, in that it



represented a figure living in a renovated Paris, exerts a powerful visual agency that insists on its autonomy as a physical being. No longer a site of sexual leisure to be mentally undressed in the street and disrobed in the bedroom, *Olympia* is in control. The prostitute's stare is preserved from the purchaser's private looking, and it is her gaze that holds him in the public exhibition. Manet, already acquainted with Baudelaire, wrote his friend seeking comfort from the storm that followed its showing in the Salon of 1865:

I really would like you here, my dear Baudelaire; they are raining insults on me, I've never been led such a dance [. . .] I should have liked to have your sane verdict on my pictures, for all these cries have set me on edge, and it's clear that someone must be wrong [. . .] In London, the academy has rejected my pictures.<sup>80</sup>

Baudelaire responds kindly, but firmly:

I must do my best to demonstrate to you your own value. What you ask for is truly stupid. People are making fun of you; pleasantries set you on edge; not one does you justice, etc., etc. Do you think you are first to be placed in this position? Have you more genius than Chateaubriand and Wagner? And did people not make fun of them? They did not die of it [. . .] You are only the first in the decrepitude of your art.<sup>81</sup>

This reply is more reminder than remonstrance. Manet must stop elevating himself to such heights that he might teeter and fall at any moment of criticism. Failing is inevitable, and should Manet lose his reputation, it will only be replaced with someone else's. Also, Baudelaire's comments belie a special fondness for an artist like Manet whose work stands apart because of its shabby choice of subject. *Olympia* is passé because it stunningly captures the image of a passé world desperately trying to reinvent itself. In painting a whore, Manet redraws the parameters of the nude as a classical subject of visual art. Like Baudelaire's hero of modern life, he exposes the female nude as body of an official knowledge while at the same time giving it agency against that official knowledge. Swinburne's first-hand experience of the bare body as a site of discipline at Eton would lead him to make a similar account of the nude in verse. Edmond Gosse notes how "almost all of Swinburne's literary convictions were formed while he was at school" and Eton played the crucial role in Swinburne's poetic development by exposing his mind to Sappho and his bottom to the paddle.<sup>82</sup>

Upon entering public school on 24 April, 1849 Swinburne was quickly enmeshed in the cloistered and privileged world of classical education and oppressive, exhibitionary discipline.<sup>83</sup> Though a gifted literary and linguistic talent (he won the Prince Consort's Prize in Modern Languages in 1852), Swinburne's presence at college was scorned by teachers and pupils just as *Olympia* was disdained by the majority of critics. Edmund Warre, a classmate, recalls "how Swinburne was invariably late for early school, 'a shock of red unbrushed hair, trailing shoelaces, and an avalanche of books slipping from his arm'" (29). Even his tutor James Leigh Joynes said of Swinburne, "'I did my best for that ungodly boy. He was hopeless'" (29). Ironically, however, the Classical Greek and Latin

forming the core of Eton's curriculum, found a true believer in Swinburne. Required readings on Sappho "took possession of his [Swinburne's] soul" and made a life-long pagan out of him (30). Further, despite the Etonian tutor's "commonplace, inevitable, and self-perpetuating" predilection for discipline and punishment, reading Sappho for class emboldened Swinburne, inspiring him to focus the strict discipline of public school into an insubordinate artistic imagination (35). Swinburne freely admits in *Notes On Poems and Reviews* (1866) that,

We in England are taught, are compelled under penalties to learn, to construe, and to repeat, as schoolboys, the imperishable and incomparable verses of that supreme poet [Sappho]; and at least I am grateful for the training. I have wished, and I have even ventured to hope, that I might be in time competent to translate into a baser and later language the divine words which even when a boy I could not but recognise as divine.<sup>84</sup>

"Taking the birch," the common penalty for lassitude and disobedience, offered Swinburne a way to cultivate genius despite his humiliating standing with teachers and peers. "Mad Swinburne," as Jerome McGann notes, "used school violence to ironically protest against the inequities of the school system, or a way of laughing at adversity in which the impulse to play is seized as the human alternative to a situation as grotesque as it is unalterable."<sup>85</sup> The obligation to make a reward out of punishment fed Swinburne's instinct to become a verse writer in Sappho's image.

Boys at College were publically whipped in rooms with the door held open, and passersby and whoever else interested could watch and vicariously participate in the metings out of physical punishment which were frequent and unregulated:

It was, from my time, so far from being a punishment administered on special occasions only, or with any degree of solemnity, that some half-dozen boys were flogged every day. It was entirely public; anyone who chose might drop in. I have sometimes been one of three spectators, and sometimes one of a hundred.<sup>86</sup>

Flogging sessions could make one famous at College, and this proved a key element in seeding Swinburne's literary life and burgeoning his aesthetic interests. The motifs of Swinburne's flagellant writings have been well documented: A schoolboy is caught for a minor misdemeanour, endures the fearful anticipation of being beaten, pleads for mercy where there is none, undergoes the shame of exposing his bottom before the master and the other boys, and is beaten. The damage of the birch is described in rather lurid detail. Technically, however, the verses are superbly crafted along a mock-heroic style with openings like "I sing the Flogging Block. Thou, red-cheek'd Muse" in "The Flogging Block. An Heroic Poem." Swinburne's flagellant poetry transforms the blistering, raw pain of school rule into a creative act that inverts the Etonian culture of discipline, observation, and punishment. Though Manet trembled before critics when exhibiting *Olympia*, Swinburne's bold defence of *Poems and Ballads* echoes the reassurances Baudelaire wrote to his friend. The sanctioned exposure of bodies at Eton allowed for an intricate poetics that asserts a personal expression that works within accepted codes for classical art while

completely overturning codes for representing the woman as acceptably subordinate to visual control.

## II. Swinburne and Sappho: Seeing London Through Ancient Greece

I would like to explore the implications of French paintings of the nude on the lyrics written for *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1868) and *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* (1878), and how these might inform broader conceptions of aesthetics as developed in response to modernity. According to Rooksby, “Swinburne’s relationship to the world in general was problematically extreme [. . .] it was as though a barrier often descended between himself and the environment. It seems as though he could only cross it [. . .] by being transported out of himself” (40). By working within his shared affections for Baudelaire, Sappho, and Whistler, Swinburne crosses between the worlds of the pagan and the divine, the physically violent and the refined. Though few of Swinburne’s poems take issue with overtly urban images or subject matter, it is erroneous to believe that Swinburne did not consider the city when writing. In living at No.7 Lindsey Row, Chelsea (now 101 Cheyne Walk), Swinburne established a deep and lasting friendship. Through this alliance, the works of poet and painter found immediate inspiration in each other, specifically in regards to technique. Swinburne composed “Before the Mirror” in response to Whistler’s *Symphony in White No. 2 : The Little White Girl* and would have had almost constant contact with Whistler while he painted the thirty two paintings making up the *Nocturne* ensemble.<sup>87</sup> Their artistic collaboration and correspondence, in which Swinburne affectionately addressed Whistler as “mon père,” merges practices of empirical perception, remembrance, and imagination.<sup>88</sup> Affirming himself as a “universal harmoniser,” Whistler worked from a mnemonic technique remarkably similar to Baudelaire’s in which,

The relations between memory and the imagination are so direct and immediate, that the imagination does no more than fuse the material furnished to it by the memory, thus producing completely new compounds. The cultivation of a pictorial memory, while strengthening and serving the imagination, undoubtedly favours artistic composition.<sup>89</sup>

Together, their poetry and painting follows a practice of interior vision in which the artist writes and paints from within an internalised vision of the city. Just as Whistler drew upon the physical geography of the city, Swinburne was inspired by a geography of literary influence. Through Théophile Gautier's description of the Thames as a thoroughfare similar to that of the Boulevards in Paris, Whistler sees the river as London's principal line of circulation. For Gautier, "The moving line of panorama which ceaselessly occurs [on the Thames] is something so novel and grand that one cannot tear oneself away from it," and following suit, Whistler found the river a vivid manifestation of the intensity of modern life, a true expression of modernity in paintings like *Nocturne in Blue and Silver-Chelsea* (1871).<sup>90</sup> The concept of water-bound space as evocative of a mood characterises the *Nocturnes* and allows the physical signifiers like Parisian boulevards and the London river to stand as an aesthetic experience; London "remembers" Gautier, and through this memory bears a resemblance to Paris. Similarly the Hellenised Parisian environment in Baudelaire's lyric "Lesbos" facilitates a fluid textual exchange through its representation of the Greek isle and the Leucadian cliffs. Consequently, Swinburne cultivates a filial partnership between visions of modernity in England, France, through his representation of

bodily fluids at Aphrodite's mythical birthplace Paphos in his translation of the Sapphic fragment "Anactoria."

Jonathan Crary's concept of modernity as a specifically optical phenomenon weighs importantly here. I would like to parse *Poems and Ballads* for traces of a development in vision that for Crary spans the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. As argued in *Techniques of the Observer* (1992),

The problem of the observer is the field on which vision in history can be said to materialise, to become itself visible. Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, properly interrogating the problems associated with representations of modernity begs an explanation of the visual procedures used for seeing the subject in city and those procedures used by city dwellers themselves. The changes implemented to facilitate the ideological unity of industry, science, and class provide an important context for understanding those special problems involved in the attempt to visualise the paradox of de Certeau's concept city. In first investigating the visual and narrative maps used to enforce mainstream ideology I hope to subsequently show how representations resistant to totalisation inform the visual economy present in Swinburne's lyrics.<sup>92</sup>

In reading *Poems and Ballads First and Second Series* in specific relation to modernity, vision, and the city, I would like to compare practices of empirical representation in mid-Victorian London contemporaneous with Swinburne's writings in order to provide a method for comparing an exterior, rationalised city with a city as imagined by the artist working inside it. These two cities, one written by official forces, the other by an artistic minority are part of a single context. They offer a specific rhetorical scheme for understanding the various representations of London as "overlapping components of a single social surface on which the modernisation of vision [began]." <sup>93</sup>

Swinburne reads Baudelaire's awareness of Paris as a representation of classical Greece by threading his collections with references to Sappho. In this way *Poems and Ballads* models the techniques of an observer working through the synaesthetic symptoms of an urban vision in transition. Swinburne is an observer whose vision transposes elements of Parisian modernity into English letters. The parallel homage to Sapphic fragments in "Anactoria" and "Lesbos" re-map vision in the city, providing a metaphor for how vision materialises within the urban environment. Visual mapping and poetic technique intersect in *Poems and Ballads*, and the resulting juncture will structure an analysis of how maps and art are but particular ways of looking at the world. <sup>94</sup> More specifically, I would like to negotiate the spatial fields through which Swinburne filters Baudelaire's historical theory of beauty so as to aesthetically map the English city in comparison with the scientific mappings of Charles Booth, Edwin Chadwick, and John Snow. Translating Baudelaire's image of classical Greece in Second Empire Paris enables Swinburne to poetically *dérive* through the physical locations of Lesbian poetry in ancient Greece to chart a poetical course for imagining London life.



Swinburne works with Sapphic and Gallic verse to establish a system of mutual remembrance and invocation that breaks free of given norms of observation. The Sapphic fragments and *The Flowers of Evil* are maps; they chart and document human experience in the environment. Yet instead of reading Sappho and Baudelaire uncritically as documents of external reality, Swinburne sees himself as poet working subjectively within a prescribed set of possibilities for lyric poetry without being embedded in a system of conventions and limitations.<sup>95</sup> Swinburne writes French aesthetics through a Hellenic context, so as to develop imaginations of urban modernity in an English lyrical context. Yopie Prins' admirable work in *Victorian Sappho* (1999) places Swinburne within "a rhythmicised body [of work] that disappears and reappears in the rhythms of its own scattering, according to a logic of disintegration and figurative reconstitution."<sup>96</sup> Swinburne disarms his own voice so as to speak through the songs of others. Catherine Maxwell recently broached a similar topic, arguing in *The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne* (2001) that in the English poetic tradition, "Male poets after Milton struggle with an uncompromising legacy which tells them that in order to be strong poets they must undergo a form of disfiguration."<sup>97</sup>

By combining Maxwell's ideas on how Swinburne's poetry is informed by a radically disfiguring power which distorts normative vision with Prins' contention that the Sapphic body exists, both literally and figuratively, as a set of fragments, I look to show how Swinburne's translations of Sapphic lesbianism and hermaphroditism operate as foci for a transformative, interior vision that liberates images of neutering violence, non-productive sex, and death into images of seemingly unlimited potentiality. This stands in

sharp contrast to the legacy of “the golden age of thematic mapping” from 1830 to 1855. During this period new sanitary, medical, economic and spatial descriptions of the city cried out for visual representations that allowed map readers to simultaneously situate themselves in a totality of human activity and a spatial totality which was connected to, and helped define, that human community.<sup>98</sup> Conceiving the city as a unified, quantifiable body of statistical knowledge allows residents to become visible along borders of varied experience, vulnerability to disease, for example. Such mapping elides individual bodies in a representation of a large, passive body of the city. Cartographers intervene in city life so as to actively contain and control it.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, transcribing the tattered papyri of Sappho’s verse is an invitation to song: “The more disfigured her texts, it would seem, the more Sappho is read as a figure for voice.”<sup>100</sup> Sappho’s voice, read first through Baudelaire and then through Swinburne, is figured through a spatial means that resists totalisation; *Poems and Ballads* maps a visual modernity in which bodies are not grouped along borders; they are broken apart and funnelled through areas in which synaesthesia allows for a multiplicity of forms for creative expression. This economy of sensory translation established between Sappho, Baudelaire, and Swinburne grounds the aesthetic lyric by focusing upon visual aspects of perception that implicitly link sight to site, citing to city.

Lesbian poetics uses gender and sexuality to incarnate divine inspiration in human form. When invoked as muse, the isle of Lesbos provides a space in which the personal and the geographic are psychologically mixed. “Mother of Latin games and Greek delights,” cries the speaker in “Lesbos”, poem 113 of *The Flowers of Evil*, and with this opening Baudelaire nominates “Lesbos” as isle, poet, and translator. This allows for a

powerful cultural mixing, a translation and transliteration of classical language into the common poetic tongue of Parisian verse. Language blends through tactile, vocal and emotional signifiers and so the island becomes a site where sensory data is compounded into the psychophysical act of kissing. Two pairs of connected, kissing lips combine tangible touch and heady ecstasy in direct relation to space, as evinced in the second stanza:

Lesbos, where the kisses, like cascades  
  
teeming and turbulent yet secret, deep  
  
plunge undaunted into unplumbed gulfs  
  
and gather there, gurgling and sobbing till  
  
they overflow in ever-new cascades. (6-10)

Lesbos, both a place and a personality, gives bliss and tragedy a common tongue by providing emotional and spatial depth for sense perceptions that would otherwise have been grounded purely in the body. The island here becomes a geographic representation in verse; kissing is mapped into emotive force from data organised around ideas of “where” and “there.” The transformation of physical experience into spatial awareness is rapid and effervescent, leading the reader down an interpretive path that uses an image of water flowing down a cliff side to chart the internal mental perception of space and sense. The kisses “plunge [. . .] into unplumbed gulfs” to gather in an area that cannot contain them. Kissing, as the central conceit in “Lesbos,” drives the poem’s central action, providing the

key interpretive metaphor that reveals the poem's geography as a terrain of infinite potential. As one reads the poem the physical boundary of intertwined lips materialises into the Lesbian environment of the speaker, and yet the kiss, as creative act, remains unconsummated.

The physical rendering of Lesbos through verse occurs via the power of sight to locate an area of vocal and auditory output. The overflowing cascade of gurgles and sobs in lines nine and ten allow the reader to use the auditory qualities of kissing to visualise the scene from two different perspectives simultaneously. The boundary between the kissing lips melts into the contact of liquid upon liquid and from here into physical manifestations of sorrow and elation. The speaker gurgles like a jubilant baby and sobs like a heartbroken lover; subsequently the reader sees how Baudelaire's position as author is affected by the fragmented remains of Sappho's poetry. Lesbos, as a vocally realised island, alternately proposes and revokes the possibility of resonant song by combining and recombining the same sensory elements into forces to produce voice while also stifling it. Women may be presented as "victims of tormented and anguished love" but that love is not ultimately frustrating and sterile.<sup>101</sup> The island is shaped by a speaker who cannot speak, and yet because of this, space is written into verse.

The gurgling, sobbing, cascades of kisses organise the poem around a visuality arising from a subject standing inside the mind of an island who from there bears witness to sensory events reflected around him. Baudelaire here marks a return to a visual paradigm dominant from the Renaissance up to the end of the 1700s. The physical world

of “Lesbos” is made visible to the eye and represented through the relation of an interiorised perceiver and knowing subject to an external world.<sup>102</sup> This *camera obscura* models Baudelaire as an observer who stands inside the darkened world of a Sapphic interior, witnessing images of Lesbos as they pour through a pinhole of kissing lips and become apparent as text on the written page opposite him. Further, since Baudelaire stands within the formative interior of the poem’s Sapphic space, he is well placed to manipulate the phenomena swirling around him. Giovanni Battista della Porta, credited as one inventor of the *camera obscura*, insists “one must watch the phenomena with the eyes of a lynx so that, when observation is complete, one can begin to manipulate them” and Baudelaire does just this.<sup>103</sup>

According to Crary, “the observer here is ultimately seeking insight into a universal language of symbols and analogies that might be employed in the directing and harnessing of the forces of nature.”<sup>104</sup> The contradictory forces of an ordered world whose forms can nonetheless be manipulated through visual power offer a provocative way of understanding not only how the Lesbian isle becomes visible through unspoken verse, but also for how that visibility relates to how Simmel understands the city as a heterogeneous totality of meaning and to Donald’s argument that city exists only as something to be imagined, inferred, or read. “Lesbos” deftly translates the riddle of Sappho, “the tenth and mortal muse, through whom eyes may see sound” by embodying the lyric muse into a figure of infinite aesthetic potential.<sup>105</sup> Baudelaire harnesses the power of synaesthesia to disfigure Sapphic letters, to bring them from the classical world into the nineteenth century. His voice becomes the agent that transfers the physical and temporal borders of Sapphic verse and into a collection of poetical representations of urban modernity.

“Lesbos” manipulates the processes of sense perception and interpretation so that two alternate visions of the island appear simultaneously. Kissing provides a unifying metaphor for the synaesthetic translation of the poem from the speaker’s voice into the tactile sensation of two kissing mouths, to the auditory sound effects of gurgling and sobbing, to finally yield a visual interpretation of the poem and the isle for the reader. Written in a city where “Sappho resurfaces in Paris,” “Lesbos” allows readers to see the urban lesbian reappear in the garb of ancient Greece and the Second Empire alike.<sup>106</sup> Baudelaire’s reading of the island becomes an act of sensory riddling, carried over from Antiphanes’ comedy “Sappho”:

There is a female being that hides in her womb (or in the folds of her dress) unborn children, and although the children are voiceless (*aphōna*), they call out across the waves of the sea and over the whole earth to whomever they wish, and people who are not present can hear them and even deaf people are able to hear them too. The female being is a letter (*epistole*) that carries in itself the letters of the alphabet (*tagrammata*) as infants. Although the letters are voiceless they can speak to people far away, to whomever they wish, and if some other person happens to be standing near the one who is reading, he will not hear them.<sup>107</sup>

When translated through the metaphor of kissing, this female being becomes a spatial entity. It is as if writing in Paris allows Baudelaire to channel Sappho and carry her unborn children within the geography of his poem. Though voiceless, the *aphona*

*grammata* are inscribed into *The Flowers of Evil* through a modernity whose visual capacity allows them to speak, despite the physical and chronological distance between ancient Greece and Second Empire Paris. Baudelaire hears Sappho because he is able to see her physically incarnate in the city of which he writes. She is reflected to him in Paris through the *camera obscura* of the Cytherean environment. Baudelaire is in Lesbos as much as he is in Paris. In fact, he is in Lesbos because he is in Paris. The city grants him an interior poetic vision that allows him to translate Sapphic writing out of Greece and into France. “Lesbos” observes the riddle of the *aphona grammata*, and thus Sappho appears visible within the words of the poetic speaker.

The third and fourth stanzas complicate this image by providing two contradictory kissers. Stanza three opens with an indirect invocation of Lesbos, through an homage to Phryne, one of the most notorious courtesans of ancient Greece, famous for her incomparable bosom:

Where Phryne’s breasts are judged by her own kind  
  
and every sigh answered by a kiss;  
  
where Aphrodite envies Sappho’s rite  
  
at shrines favoured as the Cypriot’s own,  
  
and Phryne’s judges never are unkind; (11-15)

Juxtaposed against this are girls from the forth stanza who “with hollow eyes / caress their ripened limbs in sterile joy /and taste the fruit of their nubility / on Lesbos” (17-19).

Baudelaire boldly locates divine power in spatial bodies. Lesbos is not only the island home of Aphrodite, but also a space where divine beauty manifests in the form of mortal flesh. The allusion to Phryne poignantly clarifies the aesthetic distinction between mortal and immortal, body and spirit. When accused in the fourth century, B.C. of profaning the Eleusinian mysteries, rites commemorating the seasonal reunion of Demeter and Persephone and the beginning of Spring, Phryne defended herself by loosening the folds of her toga and exposing herself; the judges acquitted her on grounds that her beauty stood as a mark of divine favour. By shedding her clothes, Phryne reveals the essence of her beauty just as Baudelaire here sheds the matter of Paris to show the Sapphic essence of *The Flowers of Evil*. Indeed, when Jean-Leon Gerome exhibited *Phryne devant l’Aeropage* in the Salon of 1861, critics scorned the image of a Parisienne trying to look Greek. When Phryne appears in “Lesbos” her trial takes on resonances of the Second Empire’s disdain for the nude body. By representing Paris in this period as a city that “looks Greek,” “Lesbos” uses an image from classical myth to put Paris on trial, to have the city lay itself before his readers.

The Hellenic myth used to describe the ripening of spring from the barren body of winter communicates a lyrical body that coalesces from within the outline of another. The prostitute in art again refutes authorities’ juridical power to control reality through the administration of the body. Judith Ryan argues that “Lesbos” marks a turning point in French aesthetics. The lesbian image in “Lesbos” has its own *aura*, it acquires a power over an observer who feels that the thing observed returns the gaze, gathering the view into



its own sphere of power.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Phryne's presence in "Lesbos" destabilises myths recognised as valid epistemological structures shaping reality. Phryne's trial against established religious rites refers to archaic forms of perception and experience.<sup>109</sup> The Persephone and Demeter reunification myth is rooted in superstition, ignorance and fear of a female body out of control. Baudelaire, however, invokes Phryne such that Lesbian vision flows through hollow eyes to empower female acolytes who prove their fertility to Aphrodite through same-sex and auto-erotic behaviour and not by remaining virginal. The women's mutual gaze consummates their autonomy as individuals and sexual beings. Tasting in line seventeen, like kissing in stanza two, defines a physical world existing within a poetic act in which human reality is self-determined, self-governed and free of fate and the whim of the gods.<sup>110</sup> Baudelaire sees Sappho in "Lesbos" by allowing her *aphona grammata* to transcribe his poetic reality through mouths that open onto other bodies. Sappho carries "Lesbos" within the folds of mouthed words which, though silent, enact rites at Aphrodite's shrine. The Lesbian speaker communicates through a synaesthetic language of shifting sensory perception that would otherwise be divine; touching, speaking, and sounding all become ways of seeing inside Sappho, though the Lesbian isle was originally the shrine of immortal Aphrodite. Baudelaire's poem refuses to reflect the goddess' status as a deity unaffected by modernity.

Baudelaire's figure of Phryne ruptures Aphrodite's autonomy, allowing for Sappho's break with the island's self-contained religious culture. Ryan goes too far in saying "[“Lesbos”] attempts to recapture the original self-sufficient wholeness of Lesbos while remaining painfully aware that this aim is no longer possible."<sup>111</sup> Self-exposure becomes the means through which the poem counters the hegemony of myth. Phryne's

presence allows for an alternate textual geography because of Baudelaire's ability to capture the visual economy between Sappho, the mortal muse, and the theocratic cult of beauty Aphrodite represents. His poetic practice allows an aesthetic ideal to transition from the intangible to the tangible, from a heavenly body to a physical one. Phryne wins her trial because her physical beauty retains a divine quality. However, Baudelaire also places himself inside this economy; he places himself inside Lesbos, and thereby nominates himself as her observer.

Urban aestheticism might thus be seen as symptomatic not only of a historical theory of beauty, but a modernity that is translated through Sapphic writings. Baudelaire maintains the delicate balance of observing modernity without fully taking control of it. He places himself within the *camera obscura* of Sapphic writing so that he might observe Sappho and thereby write "Lesbos." Crary explains that with the *camera obscura*, "On the one hand, the observer is disjunct from the pure operation of the device and there is as disembodied witness to a mechanical and transcendental re-presentation of the objectivity of the world" (41). In this sense Baudelaire allows Sappho to write "Lesbos" for him. On the other hand, however, "[Baudelaire's] presence in the camera [of Sappho] implies a spatial and temporal simultaneity of human subjectivity and objective apparatus [. . .] The *camera obscura* prevents the observer from seeing his or her position as part of the representation."<sup>112</sup> By allowing Sappho to write Lesbos for him, Baudelaire loses himself in what he observes. It is an ego thirsting for the non-ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies more vivid than life itself, always inconsistent and fleeting.<sup>113</sup> He is part of the Sapphic translation, blurring the distinction between nineteenth century Paris and ancient Greece. City and shrine become one.

By conflating classical shrine and nineteenth century city, Baudelaire overcomes the problematic placement of the body in the *camera obscura*. Instead of “attempting to solve the problem by marginalising the body into a phantom in order to establish a space of reason,” Baudelaire sacrifices his poetic authority to Sapphic vision.<sup>114</sup> He uses his poetic ability to commit an act of self-sacrifice to the powers of modernity. Baudelaire gives himself over to the superior muse and through self-dissolution allows his poem to be written from within. In “Keep[ing] his lookout high on the Sapphic cliff,” Baudelaire submits to “the cherished corpse of Sappho who left us” and the Second Empire gives way to a new vision of the ancient world (40, 44). Sappho becomes a force that builds the textual body of “Lesbos” from the inside out. Like “Carrion,” “Lesbos” plucks the seed of physical beauty from a corpse to build a poem from pieces of the physical environment.

### **III. Swinburne, Sappho, and Violent Modernity**

Swinburne continues Baudelaire’s practice of translating Sappho and in doing so, places himself in line as an inheritor of lyric poetry. But Swinburne also carries the forces of urban aestheticism to England. He continues Baudelaire’s poetical vision by carrying on a sustained use of the *camera obscura*, thus distinguishing himself within the English lyrical tradition and associating English aestheticism with Parisian writing. Jerome McGann places especial emphasis on Swinburne’s capacities for infinite metamorphic change and transformation, his

autopoetic system – a living form that maintains itself by a continual process of self-extrusion. Poetry’s reception history sets out the record of that process and is itself an essential part of that process. Swinburne’s writing practice is thus ‘performative’ of an autopoiesis whose ‘growth has no guerdon/ But only to grow.’<sup>115</sup>

Swinburne molds his poetic persona by pushing himself through the spatial bodies created by his predecessors. He aligns himself with the dead forbears of lyrical authority, “express[ing] his special notion of the relation between humanity and divinity” through verse translations that write the immortal muse into a human body to bring the spaces of divine inspiration into the spaces of human activity.<sup>116</sup> Swinburne gives voice to what Prins calls “Sappho’s broken tongue,” the “simultaneous articulating and disarticulating of a lyric subject” and thus his poetry is at once Sapphic and Swinburnian.<sup>117</sup> The muse becomes a bodily phantom through which the poet speaks. Sappho’s textual body thus becomes a *camera obscura* in which Swinburne’s verses are composed:

The *camera obscura* “screens” and thereby structures the world it receives by responding to both past events and present ones. The model of the camera works in tandem with a visual world characterised by plurality. The *camera obscura* translates the visual world by organising it around monads, which provide unique way of resolving the seemingly disorderly vision into a unique law of order.<sup>118</sup>

Swinburne's poetic reality works through a visual process in which fragments constantly coalesce and break apart around versified focal points. His poetry "sees" spaces in which elements of a past poetic world are rent apart and recombined into something new. The textual environment of Sapphic poetry is like the theatre of the urban environment in that like the metropolis, it constitutes a frame or theatre for activity. The buildings of the city, and its interior setting in particular, form casings for action in which, or on which, human subjects leave traces, signs of their passing.<sup>119</sup> The violent modernity in *Poems and Ballads* parallels this urban interior; markers of Sapphic elements constantly recombine within the body of Swinburne's work. *Poems and Ballads* makes a phantom of Sappho, her presence signalled by a voice sung from inside her invisible body, her verse teasing and straining the borders of normal looking.<sup>120</sup> Swinburne writes by reorganising the fragments of Sapphic texts, his verses providing new structure for the traces of her voice. Translating Sappho involves the painful process of rebuilding a shattered body; however, the energy released through the sensation of pain enables Swinburne to see poeticised bodies in two physical and geographical bodies at once.

"Anactoria" is a pained poem. It tears itself open, the verses pouring through the punctures, burns, and cuts of the speaker's wounded flesh. Swinburne's invocation divides the body so that the sores and hurts might inspire an outpouring of verse. Indeed, the first four lines' abundant blood-letting releases the energy Swinburne will use to harmonise his voice with Sappho. He puts Sappho's yearning for physical disfigurement to his own lyrical devices, knowing her jealous cries to Anactoria, her lover, will invigorate his vocal authority. Swinburne's poetic life while "bitter with thy [Sappho's] love" cuts through his reverential bond to her as a divine being. Sappho is his predecessor, but then again only

another human. The wounds the original speaker, i.e. Sappho herself, wants inflicted upon her transform into the cries Swinburne uses to amplify the sound of his song: “Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs / Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound, / And my blood strengthens and my veins abound” (1-4). The arrival of Anactoria within the poem causes body of “Anactoria” as poem to materialise around the masochistic Swinburne, who uses self-harm as a way to enclose Sappho’s body of song. The imperative tone of the invocation funnels the muse’s power into the channel of mingled blood and wounded flesh. When Swinburne “feel[s] thy blood against my blood” and exclaims “my pain pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein” it is the invigorating power of pain that allows him to take up Sappho’s body (11-12). “Why wilt thou follow lesser loves?” he demands, “are thine / Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine” and through these questions, the body of Swinburne’s voice takes possession of Sappho’s spirit (15-16). Swinburne distorts conventional representation of a betrayed lover by taking on Sappho’s means of sensory perception; masochism here instigates “the Swinburnian myth of transformative vision” through which Swinburne establishes himself.<sup>121</sup>

Swinburne translates “Anactoria” through a bodily economy. The rending of flesh leads to a rendering of words and a resuscitation of life through verse. “Anactoria” cleaves Sappho’s body in both senses of the word. The poet cuts her apart so he can adhere himself to her: “Divided into many parts, separate but also together, different but also the same, Sappho and “Anactoria” embody the paradox of “flesh that cleaves”; here, as so often in Swinburne’s verse, the verb ‘to cleave’ is used antithetically – meaning both to join and to separate.”<sup>122</sup> While the Sapphic speaker swoons under Anactoria’s “cruel faultless feet” Swinburne links his metrical rhythms around his muse’s fallen body. He weaves the feet of

his verse into the space in which the swooning Sappho once stood. The poet “vexes thee [Sappho] with amorous agonies, and shake / Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache”; he confounds Sappho with a love so strong it nearly demands her life, “Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill” and yet leaves her alive so that his verse might sound out a new version of hers (29-31). The aches and pains of Sappho’s overstretched body allow Swinburne to train his eyes to a new poetic course, deploying visual imagination everywhere.<sup>123</sup> He places the power of his living song within her mouth, turning a voice worn out into a soul revived by the rhythms of translation. Singing Sappho’s body in verse resuscitates her song: “When Swinburne’s eye/I enters the natural world it gets engulfed. In that experience one does not so much ‘see into the life of things’ as one is seen through that pervading life.”<sup>124</sup>

“Anactoria” folds the energies of physical pain into a poetics of space and place. When Swinburne enters the poem, he takes locates Sappho’s textual body by translating it according to precise physiological locations: on her skin (burn me), in her eyes (blind me), at her feet (thy faultless feet), and on her mouth (at thy lips). These points of physical contact establish the spaces in which Swinburne maps Sappho, and yet one that cannot be subjected to an all encompassing vision. Like John Snow’s mapping of the wounded or diseased body, the way “Anactoria” orders Swinburne’s contact with Sappho’s textual body indicates a proximity to bodily fluids. However, instead of producing a specialised, professional text which relates human vulnerabilities to water flow to create an anatomy “atlas” that only the medic could read, “Anactoria” operates a metaphor of liquid mixing and bodily fluidity that sees dynamism within physically ordered verse.<sup>125</sup> The desirous cry “Ah that my mouth for Muses’ milk were fed / On the sweet blood thy small wounds

has bled” the speaker longs for Sappho’s body to enter his (107-108). Wanting to “drink thy veins as wine” signals a desire for coalescence between the droplets of Sappho’s body and the notes of his lyric (111).<sup>126</sup> Swinburne wants Sappho inside his poem so that he might drown in the sounds of her voice, that she might be within him so that he might swoon surrounded by the body of her original fragment. This desire for harmony, as articulated by the rhythms of a textual body gives the poem a physical frame that can be touched. This tangibility makes Swinburne’s voice real and alive; it gives it a body “in that high place in Paphos” (64). Paphos, Aphrodite’s mythical sea-bound birth city, marks the geographical point around which the fluid body of the poem coalesces within Swinburne’s internalised representation of London.

The island city is a site of invigorated mingling, not enervating exclusivity. “Anactoria” counters the kind of anatomical vision of the city as a body so powerfully invoked by Snow. While Sappho and Swinburne’s mutual enclosure gives body and life to “Anactoria,” the enclosure imagined by James Booth, uses anatomical codes to disconnect isolated areas of the city, single outlet cul-de-sacs, for example, from the major thoroughfares of the city’s circulatory system. Disconnected from of the circulating metropolis, these enclosed areas starve and die.<sup>127</sup> Paphos, when “beheld in sleep the light that is in her [Sappho’s] high place” manifests between Swinburne and Sappho’s joined body. The light passing through the shrine enacts the mechanism of the *camera obscura*. The speaker’s recognition of a geographically definable point, here Paphos, encapsulates a progressive recombination of signs between Sappho’s textual body in Greece and Swinburne’s textual body in London. Paphos is the focal point



around which everything else can be placed into order; this point exists and is unique. From anywhere else disorder and indetermination remain. From then on, to know a plurality of things consists in discovering the point from which their disorder can be resolved, *uno intuito*, into a unique law of order.<sup>128</sup>

Swinburne includes Paphos in the poem so that he might worship Sappho, but in doing so organise the worship according to his own parameters. He places himself inside the poem, and thereby becomes a figurative attendant to Aphrodite, as Sappho was, but then uses the shrine to establish a poem resistant to a totalising authority. In Paphos, Swinburne adores Sappho from an internalised perspective particularly relevant to locating vision in the city. The “unique law of order” I see in *Poems and Ballads* subtly reworks Crary’s argument for the operation of the *camera obscura* in response to urban modernity. “Anactoria,” as an observed body, organises itself around the reflexivity and exchange between its speaking observer and the Sapphic muse.<sup>129</sup> By seeing himself in Paphos, the speaker is not prevented from seeing himself as part of the representation provided by the poem; in fact the very opposite occurs and the speaker sees himself in Sappho. Thus the body is not a problem for the camera but instead a great facilitator in establishing a space for envisioning the city. Paphos brings Swinburne and Sappho into powerful dialogue; both are present and active in the poem and neither marginalised into a phantom. The Sapphic trace in Swinburne’s translation of the original Sapphic fragment informs Swinburne’s “Anactoria” as much as he does. Paphos constructs Swinburne’s poetic imagination such that “Anactoria” redeems Booth and Snow’s anatomised city, reconfiguring it from an orderly projection of the world “made ready for inspection by the mind” into a vigorous

economy of reading and writing, a site of interpenetration for exterior architecture and interior setting.<sup>130</sup>

“Thy body is the song,” Swinburne writes, recognising his forbearer through homage and passing the forms of that song into an immortal voice: “Thy mouth the music; though art more than I, / though my voice die not till the whole world die” (74-76). Though the consumption and abolition in line one hundred culminate in the exclamation, “And in my flesh very flesh entombed!” this imperative later identifies that body as a musical instrument, “a lyre of many faultless agonies” (111-113, 140). It is this aesthetic device that generates the energy through which the poem transcends physical death. Camille Paglia suggests that in “Anactoria” Swinburne’s reverence for Sappho and her sadism means less that he impersonates her than that he submits to her as if he were a lyre played on by the sublime; he is her instrument.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, “the poetic lyre,” as Maxwell pointedly notes,

a seemingly passive instrument, has always had the potential to become part of the poetic body or a body in its own right, as when Orpheus’ body plays of its own accord to his severed head [. . .] Like a strange elusive trace, Anactoria runs through Sappho’s figures, figures which imply she is both contained within Sappho but also ‘bodies’ her forth. She makes Sappho ‘famous’, but Sappho gives her lasting fame.<sup>132</sup>

Swinburne inhabits and gives voice to Sappho, an act which vindicates her immortality. His poem is the lyre Sappho plays. When his speaker touches her body, Sappho reconstitutes herself and plays into a poetic representation of the geographical body. Defending his poem in *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, Swinburne says of Sappho: “I have striven to cast my spirit into the mould of hers, to express and represent not the poem but the poet.”<sup>133</sup> Swinburne channels himself through Sappho by casting her as a representation of an urban economy that extends itself through a text’s potential for multiplicity and plurality.

Swinburne develops a mythopoetic modernity that sees kinship between Sappho and himself through graphic and often violent metaphors of the physical body. He tears her apart so that her “faultless feet” might write a new age. For Swinburne, Sappho is “nothing less” and “nothing more” than the greatest poet precisely because nothing survives, other than mutilated fragments.<sup>134</sup> “Anactoria” cleaves the metre of Sappho’s original ancient Greek into increments so to also unite one moment of the past with the Victorian present. Translating Sappho’s poetic fragments relies upon a system that plays on synaesthetic tropes innovated by Baudelaire. Swinburne uses synaesthesia to implement a poetics of fluidity and authorial amalgamation in “Anactoria.” He blurs his authorial position by mapping himself within Sappho’s body of work. By reorganising her writing through physical violence Swinburne makes a space of classical worship into the site of English aesthetic verse.

“Anactoria,” like “Lesbos” and *Olympia*, represents a city put in two spaces at once, two bodies at once. The poem is classical and Victorian, Sapphic and Swinburnian, with a male and a female speaker. Swinburne continues a visual modernity that constantly sees within the geography of the poetic environment. Through this economy Swinburne establishes the parameters for a trajectory that effectively carries the practice articulated in *The Painter of Modern Life* as a historical theory of beauty across the Channel to Britain. Following Baudelaire’s precedent and invoking the Sapphic muse in “Anactoria” and “Hermaphroditus” allows *Poems and Ballads* to establish a “morbidity of language” that revives classical and humanist writing. It is this revival that resuscitates Sappho’s literary persona from a scattering of fragments. Verses that rend, rip, and pain the body of Sapphic work allow Swinburne to express “that transient state of spirit through which a man may be supposed to pass [. . .] seeking refuge in those violent delights which have violent ends in fierce and frank sensualities.”<sup>135</sup>

I would like to conclude my discussion by considering how “Ave Atque Vale,” written as a “little notice of a man whom I deeply admired and believed in – Charles Baudelaire” in response to an erroneous publication of Baudelaire’s obituary in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, translates the communal spirit of French urban aesthetics to members an English artistic community.<sup>136</sup> While Harold Bloom, Jerome J. McGann, and Peter Sacks follow the notion that the elegy is a competitive genre, this does not properly account for how Swinburne considers himself as one of Baudelaire’s translators in England.<sup>137</sup> Given Swinburne’s predilection for comparing textual bodies and physical bodies, it is perhaps more useful to think about how “Ave Atque Vale” engages with death so as to transcend it. The poem commemorates Baudelaire so that his practice might live on in the mode of its

verse. The French poet's body of work is both a place of passing and return. The supposedly dead Baudelaire returns as Swinburne passes his poetic powers over Baudelaire's grave. *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* (1878), in which "Ave Atque Vale" is included, achieves a sense of futurity.<sup>138</sup> Translating across sense capacities, Swinburne moves through synaesthetic paradox, from one sense into the non-sense of another. Baudelaire figures within the poem as a force whose ears listen to silent voices and whose eyes scan the invisible.

Swinburne's elegy returns to Baudelaire by returning to Sappho. Again the figure of the classical body energises a poetic vision of the metropolitan artist. Baudelaire's poetic energy endures specifically because it traces the silent sighs of Sappho's untouched mouth and plumb the depths of the Lesbian seas that swallow Sappho's hidden grave:

Ears knew all the wandering watery sighs

Where the sea sobs round Lesbian promontories,

The barren kiss of piteous wave to wave

That knows not where is that Leucadian grave

Which hides too deep in the supreme head of song. (14-18)

These lines translate Baudelaire's ability to hear silences and touch the intangible.

Swinburne uses such verse to create a spectral rhythm that beats beyond the grave. "Ave

Atque Vale” allows “the possibility of a ‘return’ of the departed [Sappho and Baudelaire] – or rather, instructing himself to learn that possibility – he [Swinburne] invokes an enigmatic concept of continuing sounds.”<sup>139</sup> Swinburne writes an elegy so that he might see with Baudelaire’s eyes, hear with Baudelaire’s ears, and speak about the experience. Thus, the otherwise invisible, inaudible Sappho surfaces from her buried body. Her corpse, that “supreme head of song” sings again, echo-located from the watery depths. The immersion of the speaker brings about a brief transcendence of separateness and recovery of unity.<sup>140</sup> It is as if Swinburne’s Baudelairean lyre plays to Sappho’s severed head in much the same way Orpheus’s lyre played for its dead master’s severed head. The revived corpse becomes a revived corpus. The poetic lyre, a seemingly passive instrument, has the potential to become part of the poetic body or a body in its own right.<sup>141</sup> Swinburne sings Baudelaire’s praises so that he can sight Sappho’s body and bring her into the scope of his own writing.

Swinburne sees his survival depending upon Sappho and Baudelaire’s mutual existence beyond the grave. These poets’ immortality engenders time and space for a new poet, a “hidden harvest of luxurious time” in which Swinburne speaks for Baudelaire, and in doing so speaks for himself (28). When Swinburne talks to Baudelaire, he also talks to himself; the line “And with each face thou sawest the shadow on each” is a self-referential comment that uses mortality as a metaphor for poetic inheritance (32). Swinburne sees the shadow of death on Sappho and Baudelaire while at the same time standing in the shadow of their persisting poetic presence.

Swinburne fertilises his poetic garden with the elegiac properties of “Ave Atque Vale.” His genius springs forth from the genius of his forbears, “seeing as men sow men reap” (33). Swinburne seeds “Ave” with the seed-like fragments of Baudelaire’s Parisian poetry. His “broken recollections of *Les Fleurs du Mal* affirm at once that a poet’s voice does remain – the ‘song continues’ but also that his words are dispersed after his death, unable to retain their original shape.”<sup>142</sup> “Ave Atque Vale” gives Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Sappho a common body. Their energies as spectral writers from beyond the grave write a poem that swirls together the fragments of modernity. The form of Swinburne’s song in stanza ten re-embodies Baudelaire and the Sapphic Muse:

Not thee, O never thee, in all times changes,  
Not thee, but this the sound of thy sad soul,  
The shadow of thy swift spirit, this shut scroll  
I lay my hand on, and not death estranges  
My spirit from communion of thy song –  
These memories and these melodies that throng  
Veiled porches of a Muse funereal— (57-62)

Swinburne touches Baudelaire so as to gather the pieces of his work into a space of familial influence. He gathers their shadows under veiled porches so as to stand amongst an artistic fellowship as Whistler, Baudelaire, and Manet do in Whistler’s close friend Henri-Fantin Latour’s *Homage a Eugène Delacroix* (1864). Like the personages in the painting, Swinburne looks from the image of a shut scroll towards something beyond the

frame of his poem. The logic of translation in “Ave Atque Vale” is one “in which the dead and the living represent moments in a collective flow of desire.”<sup>143</sup> The living and the dead clasp one another’s shut scrolls to bring them to a point of juncture. The metaphorical kinship in stanza ten extends the system of dead letters seen first in *Poems and Ballads, First Series* into a textual community of brothers and sisters. “Ave” uses a multi-voiced style of versification sustained by its ability to bring lyric poets and artists into temporal unity with hopeful inheritors. The metre here is timed both by memory and melody. Swinburne brings modernity to England in the form that is at once male and female; Greek, French and English, fourth century B.C. and nineteenth century A.D. Swinburne’s lyrics pass through a system of re-writing and re-vision. New lines take on the voice of a new speaker while re-incarnating an older spirit at the same time. Swinburne channels Sappho and Baudelaire’s cities and they channel him. The economy is mutual. Swinburne writes of an era in which lyric poetry is passed along a trajectory of bodies grounded in representations of the urban environment, be they in Paris, Cyprus, the Louvre, or London. Straddling these spaces Swinburne enables the transfer of aestheticism across the English Channel. His friendship and respect for French poets of his time allows for a to-and-fro movement between Paris, Baudelaire’s aesthetic city-as-museum and London, where he writes. Swinburne’s travels with Whistler to Paris cement his attunement to practices associated with painters of modern life.

An ekphrastic poem, “Hermaphroditus” versifies the visual encounter of a work of art with the poet-artist. Swinburne, much like the hypothetical “man in the museum” of Baudelaire’s *The Painter of Modern Life*, takes inspiration from lesser-known selections of the Louvre’s collection. In March of 1863 Swinburne travelled to Paris with painter James



MacNeill Whistler. There he encountered Polycles' second century B.C. statue of Aphrodite's and Hermes' child Hermaphroditus, a god with both male and female attributes. Fascinated with how Polycles united sexual opposites into a single physical aesthetic, Swinburne composed a poem featuring the hermaphrodite's paradoxical image as a sterile, intersex product of sexual union between discretely male and female individuals. "Hermaphroditus" transforms a visual model into text through an analysis of what Judith Butler calls the "citationality" of sex and gender, "the reiteration of a set of norms or laws that naturalizes the sex/gender conventions being repeated or 'cited', and thereby dissimulates the fact of the repetition."<sup>144</sup> Indeed, Swinburne repeats the sculptured hermaphrodite in a verse poem to destabilise norms of sexual productivity and bring his own theory of the bisexual artist to bear on hetero-normative modes of speech and vision.

The sculpture-poem breathes life into an inanimate object. Swinburne's writing bestows sight and sound to a "blind love that comes by night and casts out rest" (2). "Hemraphroditus" expresses a sexual unity that escapes the isolation of separately embodied sexual beings and condensing the notion of bodily desire and sexual coupling into one physical form. While heterosexual men and women recite marriage vows to one another to unite as man and wife, Swinburne's poeticised sculpture speaks simultaneously of male and female desire. Hermaphroditus enjoys conjugal union through self-embodiment. Hermes, the Greek god of virility and Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty are made one in reproducing their only child. This doubled act of union uses marriage as a metaphor for Swinburne's poetic inheritance. Seeing, and then writing the hermaphrodite as "turn[ing] the fruitful feud of hers and his / to the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss"

endows Swinburne's verse with a bisexual vision that reaches beyond the causality of heterosexual reproduction, life, and death (18,19). Instead of passing on the flame of life from parent to child, the statue ignites of its own accord: "from [the hermaphrodite] something like fire is shed / That shall not be assuaged till death be dead" (19-21). The statue transcends the dualism of conventional sexual relations, reproduction and descent. Swinburne's rendering of visual art into poetic literature replaces the sexual exchange of dead bodies with newborn babies with a genius that imbues an otherwise sterile body with the power to exist throughout time. This existence should not be confused with the mythical immortality in which gods seemingly live forever. Instead of living for all time the hermaphrodite lives across all time, a figure for the passing forms of modernity encasing that "eternal quality of beauty" which painters of modern life must always seek.

The poeticised hermaphrodite cites the conventional union of man and woman in marriage and yet scoffs at the unfulfilled promise that man and woman will transcend duality by producing single-sex child who will grow up, form couples, mate, and produce more single-sex children. Instead of a union borne from two individuals looking at one another, the hermaphrodite lies poised between the oppositions of solitude and unity, male and female, poet and art object as a figure of potentiality. When Swinburne observes the statue in "Hermaphroditus," the sculpted image is an "imaginative creation itself, it celebrates pause, wherein all things are possible, and the moment when one thing might begin to turn its opposite."<sup>145</sup> "Hermaphroditus" is a return to the man in the museum that personifies *The Painter of Modern Life*. It accentuates the partnership the great museum and the city share as storehouses of objects. The works of artists like Manet, Whistler, Baudelaire and Swinburne concern an environment where the artist must reconcile two

modes of representation folded into one urban environment: space and time. Following the circulation of objects and images through the city,

Readers of Swinburne's poetry come aware that apparently negative-sounding words like 'barren' and 'sterile', when applied to androgynies, lesbians, or femme fatales, carry a hidden positive meaning of exemption from the relentless cycle of human reproduction. And in place of human reproduction there may be another form of regeneration [. . .] From Swinburne's phantasmata another spectral being emerges, as that image formed here is less like the Louvre sculpture than illustrations of the so-called 'alchemical hermaphrodite'.<sup>146</sup>

When Swinburne states, "Great poets are bisexual, male and female at once," he uses the intersex figure to point towards a practice in which literature translates the visual arts into words, and further, correlates the static aspect of representation unique to painting and sculpture to the dynamic nature of language.<sup>147</sup> The aesthetic processes Baudelaire associates with writing and the city lead to a negotiation of temporal and spatial modes in the fin-de-siècle through ongoing collaborations between Pater, Wilde, Symonds, Mallarmé, Whistler, Verlaine, and Michael Field, and Baudelaire's continued influence within the greater London and Paris art world. Poeticised portraits of aesthetic writers and the aesthetic city engage with questions raised by questions like Swinburne's "alchemical hermaphrodite," who by being two sexes at once, personifies a momentary pause, a break within the construct of chronological time. Through "Hermaphroditus" the sequential second that determines minutes and hours finds itself unitary, eternal, and self-

substantiating. It need not stand between preceding and successive moments when it can stand for itself. Ekphrastic inspiration such as this grapples with the city's paradoxical positioning as an entity that brings the still moment of art into contact with a world governed by temporality. Can city life lead to an attainment of the eternal youth? It is this paradox crafted through literature and art to which I now turn, paying specific mind to the implications of ekphrastic vision on what Symons comes to call the Symbolist movement in literature.

### **Chapter Three: Entering the Invisible City: Urban Writing and the Ekphrastic Image**

The Symbolist representation of the city finds its roots in modes for poetically mapping the city via visual experience. Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, and Arthur Symonds in particular develop techniques for representing London as an environment constituted by sight. Their conceptions of the city arise through ekphrasis, a classical rhetorical practice through which a speaker textualises observed images. Ekphrasis allows these writers to speak of the city in terms of sensory experience, and to project that experience immediately to the reader. Technically speaking, ekphrasis allows a speaker to verbally transport a remote physical object to the eyes of his or her viewing audience. The application of this rhetorical technique to the city and city poetics forms the procedural basis for my argument here in chapter three. Ekphrasis provides artists with a practical way of accessing unseen or hidden aspects of the urban landscape. In accessing this hidden city, as I will later show, artists like Wilde, Field, and Symonds develop alternate ways of seeing London through textualised images of the city by applying ekphrastic practices to their contemporary metropolis. These artists use ekphrasis as a method for translating the visible world into verse, a technique through which a work of visual art is given life in a work of literature.<sup>148</sup> Ekphrasis, as I will show, provides a particularly useful context for thinking about how artists produce visual images of the city in paint and in text and further, the extent to which classical thought informed conceptions of the city in the late nineteenth century.

Ekphrasis works via its linguistic capability to present an invisible image to an audience; its *enargeia* links the written or spoken word intrinsically to the object discussed. This *enargeia* operates via a quality of narrative vividness which creates the illusion that the absent object of description is actually present. Thus, an individual, an object, or scene from the city, when rendered in ekphrastic speech, becomes apparent at the very moment of its verbal articulation.<sup>149</sup> Further, ekphrasis is audience focused, intended to create the illusion that the described object is actually present to the audience or reader. Aelius Theon's *progymnasmata*, or handbook, for ekphrasis describes the technique as "descriptive speech, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight."<sup>150</sup> Theon distinguishes here between ordinary speech and a rhetorical method designed to synaesthetically render speech into vision. Instead of describing an environment or an event through a linear recitation of characteristics, the environment or event flows outward from the speaker through its own accord. The event under discussion surrounds the audience as the speaker speaks of it. Thus, this effect, through which an audience is surrounded by a remote environment through ekphrastic speech, offers a powerful alternative to conventional methods used for writing the city. Instead of speaking about the city, the artist speaks the city. Instead of depicting the city through a linear narrative of past events, the ekphrastically delivered city travels through time-space and appears immediately in the location of the speaker's present audience.

A rhetorical practice that linguistically transports an otherwise invisible object to a viewer elucidates a key moment at the end of the nineteenth century; a moment characterised by growing interest in how the classical world might be used as a reference

for the development of aesthetic culture. Swinburne's theoretical references to the ancient world in *Poems and Ballads* find their practical roots in Theon's *progymnasmata*, which again resurface in Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*. The "man in the museum" now functions not only as a metaphor for the artist in the city, but for a precise method of vision at work in the city. Placing *The Painter of Modern Life*'s theory of historical beauty within the technical framework of ekphrasis, as it refers to a rhetorical translation of the visual world, provides a sharp insight into how vision works in Baudelaire's poetics to destabilise clean, linear narratives of the city. Baudelaire's interest in "very interesting, secondary pictures" in the Louvre revises current aesthetic standards, opting for a particular beauty neglected by the masterpieces of Titian or Raphael (1). Further, the resurgence of ekphrastic technique at the end of the nineteenth century occurs within a wider trend in which pictorial art depicted morality. The writers examined here provide useful alternatives to artists who, like Baudelaire's metaphorical museum goers, "having once read Bossuet and Racine, fancy they have mastered the history of literature" (1). Wilde, Field, and Symons propose alternate kinds of ekphrastic readings of the city, using a technique that ultimately brings the city to the immediate moment of perception. For Wilde, ekphrasis allows Dorian Gray to use the city as a laboratory in which sensory impressions are experienced in the full intensity of the present moment. Ekphrasis powers the way Dorian's image alters in response to urban exploration, while Dorian himself remains ever-young. Indeed, the picture becomes a portrait of Dorian's personal city, the London he creates for himself through his city life. London, for Michael Field, is a storehouse of museum pictures whose painted environments can be accessed through verse translations of art. Ekphrasis allows Field to enter the world of a painting through the realm of verse. Symons applies ekphrasis directly to the city, writing about London as if the city immediately before his eyes was a painted image; this enables him to bring the city

he immediately experiences as an urban writer and observer immediately to his readers. City images delivered through ekphrasis exhibit reality as a unity between the observer and the urban environment. In contrast to the moral lessons conveyed in pictorial narratives of the city by Victorian artists such as William Powell Frith or Charles Dickens' illustrator, George Cruikshank, such aestheticist urban writing emphasises the immediate and individual sensory experience of the city by the city dweller.

This chapter explores how English artists and writers in the late nineteenth century develop a scopic technique for seeing and writing the forces of urban modernity. It continues the second chapter's premise by examining ways in which James Donald's important assertion that the city is a text arrives through visual encounters in the city environment. However, while the second considered the ways Algernon Charles Swinburne's poetry in *Poems and Ballads* uses Sapphic metaphor to conjure Baudelaire's Paris in *The Flowers of Evil*, this third chapter looks to examples of direct representation of urban life in art and literature. Arthur Symon's assessment of art as a phenomenon peculiar to the metropolis in his Prologue to *Days and Nights* (1887) calls the reader to,

Go where cities pour

Their turbid human stream through art and mart

A dark stream flowing onward evermore

Down to an unknown ocean; -- here is Art.<sup>151</sup>



This idea, to “go where cities pour [. . .] here is art” guides my enquiry into the visual narratives produced through its direct contact with “the dark stream” of crowded city dwellers. The artists and critics considered here use the city as both a means and an end in works which attempt to visualise urban experience. I hope to illuminate these issues in particular regard to modes of literary production in a particularly image-oriented urban culture, and thereby trace the emergence of a pictorially driven poetic vision in the fin de siècle.

## **I. Seeing London, Writing London**

Ekphrasis proves so useful for investigating urban poetics because it allows for a writing practice that maps London according to the immediate perceptual experience of an individual. Because ekphrasis allows a speaker or writer to conjure an otherwise remote physical environment, it bypasses the need for a secondary interpretive metaphor. While Frith and Cruikshank use the city to deliver a significant moral message, ekphrasis too delivers the environment it references immediately to the reader. Though these artists often sought to provide a clear, freeze-frame portrait of urban life to city residents, the crowded city always occluded and eluded ocular capture. Here, I hope to provide a brief account of the methods used to try and control representations of London. Attempts either to totalise or to elide the city into an easy narrative expose the gaps through which alternate readings of the city take root; while Paris was rebuilt by Haussmann into a metropolis of long boulevards interspersed with open-air vistas, London’s population explosion crowded the city centre and made clear, unhindered vision nearly impossible. Something was always in the way of a clear line of sight, and this chapter examines the ways artists coped with an extremely crowded visual environment. Roy Porter has noted

that “between 1800 and 1900 from just under a million inhabitants to some 4.5 million, London was the super-city *de luxe*. Driven by market forces, it ‘just grewed’, without central command.”<sup>152</sup> The problematic task of writing London into maps encouraged painters, writers, literary and art critics, social reformers alike to hypothesise how the city situated itself within conflicting notions of the empirical and the ideal. Henry James, for example, wrote:

One has not the freedom to speak of London as a whole, for the simple reason that there is no such thing as the whole of it. It is immeasurable – embracing arms never meet. Rather it is a collection of many wholes, and of which of them is it most important to speak?<sup>153</sup>

The emergence of urban exploration in social statistics studies like Hector Gavin’s report *Sanitary Ramblings, Being Sketches and Illustrations, of Bethnal Green. A Type of the Condition of the Metropolis and Other Large Towns* (1848) for the Metropolitan Sanitary Commission made sense of these “individual wholes” by plotting them around statistical models and theories on public health. Detective fiction like Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* series (1891) in *The Strand* uses colonial invasion and the exotic to map these cities-within-a-city.<sup>154</sup> The representational modes offered by Holmes’ “pure science” of deductive reasoning for criminal investigation, along with Gavin’s mathematical models for public sanitation in London city offer their own range of images for understanding the condition of urban life.<sup>155</sup>

Grasping the huge variety of visual stimuli in London, in the late nineteenth century, was a troubling phenomenon for the everyday observer. The limited scope and range of physiological vision restricted what seemed to be a boundless phenomenon. The physical eye could only see so far, hindered constantly by peripheral blind spots and focal vanishing points. And yet there was always something else to see by simply turning one's head or changing one's position. However, the mind's eye could take over once the body's eye had reached its scopic limit. Kate Flint's powerful study of the Victorian fascination with the act of seeing, takes issue with specific accounts of visual reliability in the nineteenth century. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (2000) offers an account of the period from the perspective of the human eye, examining the Victorians through their problems with interpreting the seen world. Flint shows just how unstable vision remained given the tensions existing between different valuations of outward and inward seeing.<sup>156</sup>

Observation involved intertwined notions of social compliance, objective empirical study, and subjective creative vision. The viewing public, it seemed, delighted in models which supplied a complete, quantifiable image that their own eyes were incapable of delivering. Théophile Gautier, commenting from the 1862 International Exhibition, discerns a painterly precision through which "everything in [William Powell Frith's] pictures shows significance, observation, volition. The slightest detail has meaning."<sup>157</sup> For Gautier, Frith condenses physical reality into a painted reality on canvas, and thus gives viewers a precisely measured image with which they can cope. Further, Frith's works often include a series of several paintings which displayed a sequence of events. The images then string together a linear visual narrative when hung on gallery

walls. Unlike ekphrasis, which delivers the city immediately to an audience, Frith attempts to compensate for a physically limited eye by parsing the city for images which his painterly hand might deliver through neat storyboards. With trite titles like *The Road to Ruin* (1878) and *The Race for Wealth* (1880), these painted fictions exemplify an urban identity which, “rather than being regarded as something innate, pre-inscribed on the body, was increasingly recognised as something which could be deliberately constructed for others to read.”<sup>158</sup>

However, as shown in chapter two, Swinburne takes up the image and activity of the Parisian *flâneur* while writing the *Poems and Ballads* series, and thereby uses physical spaces and bodies taken from Sappho’s Greece to free up an imaginary space within established narratives determining Victorian London. Pictures like Frith’s, which neatly articulate city life according to moral paradigms, are thus incomplete. They ignore the spaces in which the city tricks its inhabitants into rendering unstable images.<sup>159</sup> It is in this context that I wish to associate late nineteenth century London with a poetics that expresses and redeems a climate of decline through an artistic sensibility inherited from the classical world. Gautier, that poet, novelist and commentator who so poignantly saw Paris in the swirling Thames, theorised on a “style of decadence,” through which the maturity of culture brought about a decay of accepted linguistic meanings, which in turn initiated new correspondences between the lived outer environment and the imagination. The use of ekphrasis in fin de siècle urban writing grows out of this. Indeed, the rhetorical capacity of the ekphrastic speaker comes directly from the subject of his speech, which in this case is the city itself.

Ekphrasis mediates the way that style renders the decaying boundary between the speakable and the unspeakable, the visible and the invisible. It provides the poet with a way to render a remote experience immediately apparent. The vaguest, most fleeting experiences materialise through the ekphrastic urban encounter. “Hermaphroditus,” for example, exposes gaps in a morally imagined body by mixing classical myth with given norms for sexual physiology. By writing about a sculpture that is both male and female, Swinburne overturns a progress-oriented narrative of sexual reproduction by imbuing a temporally static visual image with a poetics that looks back into time in order to see a new, intersex body in contemporary art. The hermaphrodite exudes energy that crosses the time difference between the antique and the nineteenth century and closes the formal separation between sculpture and verse. The ekphrastic *enargeia* that combines of dynamic language with a stationary image, I argue becomes a means through which the city speaks. Swinburne in “Hermaphroditus” not only translates a sculpted image into words, but uses the ancient world to reorganise the spaces in which aesthetic discourse is produced.<sup>160</sup>

Ekphrasis provides a specific methodology through which writers in the fin de siècle destabilise the narrative frame that sets art images into ideological narratives. Oscar Wilde, Michael Field and Arthur Symonds transport their narrative portraits of a visual scene directly before the viewer independent of any secondary reference. Building from Pater’s call in *The Renaissance* to “see the object as in itself it really is,” their writing guides the trajectory of an ekphrastic writing process which results in an urban poetics that looks at the city as if it were a work of art; In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian’s activities in the East End paint the degenerating figure in his picture, while his physical body remains ever-young and fully present in his sensory impressions. To best poeticise

city art galleries, Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley, as Michael Field, use ekphrasis in *Sight and Song* to enter the field of the painted image, and from there, “translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves.”<sup>161</sup> Arthur Symons, drawing upon Wilde’s depiction of the city and Field’s notion of poetic and painterly translation, applies ekphrasis directly to the city. Symons writes about the city in terms of personal experience. His preface to *Silhouettes* sets an agenda for poetics which uses the visual impression to express,

an equal liberty for the rendering of every mood of that variable and inexplicable and contradictory creature which we call ourselves, of every aspect under which we are gifted or condemned to apprehend the beauty and strangeness and curiosity of the visible world.<sup>162</sup>

Literary experiments such as Wilde’s, Field’s, and Symons’ direct poetry and prose towards a complete, though not unproblematic, encapsulation of a visual image in written text. This in turn offers up a symbolist practice which would in a new, sudden way, “flash upon you the ‘soul’ of that which can be apprehended only by the soul – the finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident.”<sup>163</sup>

Literary interest in the metaphysical states brought about by the modern city, such as eternal youth, self-animated paintings, and unseen worlds, owes much of its development to the writings of Walter Pater. Pater’s work ranges over a variety of interests and talents that characterise men of letters’ broad education before academic

specialisation became standard for university students. From a twentieth century perspective, his best known work falls into categories of literary and cultural theory, art history, classical studies, and literary criticism. With the exception of classics, none of these subjects could be studied at degree level in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>164</sup> As a result, the breadth of Pater's knowledge in humanities subjects plays heavily in his criticism, given his holistic awareness of them. It allows him to blend critical appreciations of various disciplines together, most notably when he uses art to describe literature and uses literature to describe art. Further, Pater's interdisciplinary education, especially his overlapping knowledge of art and literature, strongly informs his sphere of influence. His criticism, I contend, led certain members of his contemporary readership to write about the city in terms of the visual arts. His belief that "artists, philosophers, and those whom the action of the world has elevated and made keen [. . .] breathe a common air, and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts" in *The Renaissance* (1873) became a rallying cry for young aesthetes.<sup>165</sup> Swinburne would thank Pater by letter for sending "his beautiful verses on Gautier."<sup>166</sup> Wilde and Symonds, whom he would mentor at Oxford, would refer to him in their works, as would later friends like Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, known collectively as Michael Field.<sup>167</sup> As is well known, one of Pater's most significant critical contributions was the way he used the visual arts to style English decadence in and its related goal "to see the object as in itself it really is" in *The Renaissance* (xix). The following section focuses on two issues; first, those instances in which Pater's criticism discusses the painted image as the field in which observation and aesthetic appreciation occurs and second, how these passages provide the impetus for a trend in urban ekphrasis through their specific examination of "instances of undergoing and transmitting influence" mediated through the painted canvas.<sup>168</sup>

It is in this context that I would like to consider how Pater's writing prefigures an urban aesthete who actively opens himself to the disruptive forces of the city. *Gaston de la Tour* (1896) and its predecessor *The Renaissance* together mark Pater's interest in modernity, as particularly formulated through the metaphorical act of looking at pieces in an art museum. And as they did for Swinburne, Baudelaire's critical and poetical writings play a key role in shaping Pater's writings in this respect. To continue a theme introduced in previous chapters, Pater weaves his aesthetic criticisms around the "man of the museum" from *The Painter of Modern Life*. In both *Gaston* and *The Renaissance*, as in *The Painter of Modern Life*, works of art function mnemonically. In the former text, looking at a portrait stimulates Gaston's associative memory to tie him into a larger aesthetic community. When Pater has Gaston gaze at the portrait of the young poet in the chapter "Modernity" he joins the chapter, under the cover of allegory, to a retrospective tribute to Baudelaire. The portrait is his device for remembering.<sup>169</sup>

Just as Baudelaire uses museum pieces by Titian to describe how modernity might lie in works of a "particular beauty, the sketch of manners," Pater uses the Mona Lisa to depict the particular mannerisms of modernity immediately discernable to the observer. If *The Painter of Modern Life* is a textbook for reading Parisian modernity, then *The Renaissance* might provide its English readers with a way of discerning modernity in London. Pater, as an observer of the Mona Lisa, prefigures Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, Arthur Symonds as observers of the city. Pater develops his aesthetic theory by looking at a work of art, and delivering its modern qualities directly to the reader through his discussion. Wilde, Field, and Symonds derive their respective aesthetic theories by viewing



the city as if they were each looking at a work of art, and then use ekphrasis to convey their ideas to readers in prose and verse.

*The Renaissance* evokes the way in which *La Gioconda*'s lips stand "as the embodiment of that old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea" (80). In turn, Wilde, Field, and Symons use ekphrasis to depict "the modern idea" of London life, as if the city were a work of art. Pater acknowledges the smile of Da Vinci's portrait as an expression that occupies multiple times and multiple spaces simultaneously, and this informs his disciples' literary interest in the wide spectrum of sensory perception available to the city dweller. Wilde, Field, and Symons use Pater as a point of departure for their own ekphrastic examinations into the city as a purely aesthetic environment. They, like Pater, "admit dissent even to the degree of heresy," by turning away from moralistic valuations of city life in order to assess London as a field of sensory stimuli.<sup>170</sup> In this respect they, like the painters covered in *The Renaissance*, "sketch a unity in diversity" in their "outbreak of the human spirit" (2). The analysis that proceeds from here examines how ekphrastic method is incorporated into a modern literature that delves in to the secrets of the city. Urban ekphrasis, I contend, exposes the *enargeia* of modernity active within the fin de siècle city. Works like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Sight and Song*, and *London Nights*, "breath a common air, and catch the light from each other's thoughts," carrying on different interpretations of "the decadence" as they write picture portraits of city life (*The Renaissance* xxiii).

## II. Ekphrasis, Enargeia, and Eternal Youth

For Wilde, the city works much like the artist's palette; one could paint the colours of urban experience onto the person just as the painter could add pigment to a portrait. He examines this possibility through Dorian Gray, who, in adopting the Paterian adage "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end [. . .] to burn with that hard, gemlike flame," enters into an experiment on the perceiving mind's ability to fashion picture portraits of a personal city (*The Renaissance* 152). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) dramatises the viewing subject seeing himself seeing.<sup>171</sup> The work considers how a portrait might depict the effects urban life has upon a city dweller as those events actually happen. Indeed, snippets of London noise are quietly audible whilst Dorian sits for his portrait. Amidst this setting Dorian meets and is seduced by Lord Henry Wotton, Wilde's characterisation of Baudelaire's perfect *flâneur*. An urban dandy and aesthete, Lord Henry lives permanently in the city while, importantly, remaining ever detached from it. Stimulated by the paradoxical wit Lord Henry uses when making observations on urban life, Dorian is enticed to explore the city for himself, and to believe that London exists as a variety of sensory experiences arranged especially for him. Though the reader only catches glimpses of Dorian's adventures, the painting itself becomes the ekphrastic device through which London, as Dorian lives it, is revealed.

Basil Hallward, the artist who paints Dorian, seeks to sublimate his imaginative powers into an image whose painted canvas will reveal the effects of his soul's experience. His portrait of Dorian is immensely personal, something in which he "has bared the secret

of [his] own soul.”<sup>172</sup> Pater’s influence shines through here. Basil’s comments powerfully resonate with *The Renaissance*’s take on the artistic impression as a force beyond empirical enquiry, forces whose esoteric powers “rust iron and ripen corn” (150). Instead of aging Dorian, however, Basil achieves the opposite. The artist makes a receptacle of his portrait; its colours contain such creative power and technical ability that it harbours the secret of eternal youth. When Basil admits Dorian’s portrait bears the secret of his soul, it is as if his craft and his personality are one, as if artistry stands for identity.

The sitter’s image, however, is not so easily separated from its essence. Basil cannot help but admit to Lord Henry Wotton that when his eyes met Dorian’s for the first time, “I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my very art itself” (9). Wilde here fashions Dorian into a human art object to trace Basil’s interest in Dorian back to a painter’s desire to control his subject. Basil observes how Dorian transitions from simply a face “of a young man not more than twenty” in a crowded party, to an all-consuming impression of personality (9). In so doing, he admits his vulnerability to his painted subject. Dorian enters Basil’s mind of his own accord. His image is self-agented, extending beyond the physical representation of a face to mental representations of that face as well. Thus, when Hallward paints the young man, he does so to control of his own art, to sublimate his abilities by subduing Dorian’s hypnotic personality to canvas and frame.

The counterbalancing of the artistic imagination's desire for control with the unique personality of the art image enables the uncanny doubling of portrait and sitter in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The painting and the man are one in the same; there is no secondary representation of the primary image. When Basil paints Dorian, he transfers his artistic ability into an image, and from that image, Dorian is made into an artist. His desire for Dorian energises the portrait; it provides the energy that allows him to conjure Dorian's image in his mind, and then bring that image immediately to an audience in painted form. The portrait functions as an ekphrastic rhetorical device powered by the *enargeia* of desire, and significantly, it is Basil's homosocial desire that brings Dorian in contact with Lord Henry, who subsequently excites Dorian's interest in London as a sensory environment.

Painting Dorian, for Basil, is an exercise in visualisation that ensures that his oral description of Dorian to Lord Henry sparks a clear mental impression in the mind of his audience.<sup>173</sup> By allowing Dorian to see his self-portrait while he models for it, a similar ekphrasis follows. By observing his image from a second-person perspective, as if he were in the audience of a separate performance, Dorian becomes aware of the creative energy he excites in Basil and how his image dominates the artist's mind. However, in becoming immediately aware of his own perfect youth, Dorian also sees how youth is the most fragile of beauties, that "the life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth [. . .] But this picture will remain always young" (25). In recollecting his impression of Dorian Gray to Lord Henry, Basil causes Dorian, who observes the completion of his own painted image, to remember that his beauty will always be a transient element of life, forever fleeting as he ages. Youth, as a single impression, will fade with time with nothing but old age to take its place. Unless it can be

linked to a larger stream of sensation, youth, in Dorian's eyes, is a failure. But by remembering Dorian at the party, narrating that experience to Lord Henry, and then painting it for Dorian, Basil's desire to hold and control Dorian's image in his imagination produces the *enargeia* that powers Dorian's wish to lock his temporal existence in the painting: "If it were I who was to be always young and the picture that was to grow old [. . .] I would give my whole soul for that!" (25-26). Basil, by relating his obsession with Dorian to Lord Henry at a party during the height of the London social season, transfers Dorian's ekphrastic wish from the studio to the city.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an aesthetic study that examines what might happen if the effects of one's impressions could be trapped into a single picture. Further, it places that examination specifically in the urban environment. Basil paints Dorian within earshot of "the dim roar of London [which] was like the bourdon note of a distant organ" (5). And just as Dorian's impressions prove ever fleeting, his painted image's portrayal of them remains an ever-permanent depiction of the scenes of his urban explorations as they unfold in the East End. The way Basil uses painting as a technique for ekphrastically rendering his desire for Dorian enables Lord Henry to inject his fascination with London life into Dorian. Dorian in turn paints a portrait of his fascination with Town, drawing a self-portrait of his city with his feet:

It never would have happened if I had not met you [Lord Henry]. You filled me with a wild desire to know everything about life. For days after I met you, something throbbed in my veins. As I lounged in the Park, or strolled down

Piccadilly, I used to look at everyone who passed me, and wonder, with a mad curiosity, what sort of lives they led. Some of them fascinated me [. . .] There was an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion for sensations . . . Well, one evening at about seven o'clock, I determined to go out on some sort of adventure. I felt this grey, monstrous London of ours, with its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins, as you [Lord Henry] once phrased it, must have something in store for me. (44)

Wilde uses Basil's art to question the relationship between physically sensed experience, and subjective, ego-driven desire. Basil's rendering of the portrait juxtaposes emotional elements like personality and desire with technical painterly skill to take on the problematic representation of art as personal experience. Dorian, in wishing the portrait to bear the effects of time, uses his picture to create an emotional map of London, the site of his sensory experimentations. In this case the city is something visualised through aesthetic experiences shared between men.

The novel considers what might happen if life were something to be crafted according to one's own means and desires. The homosocial triangle between Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry catalyses the portrait's magical ability to express Dorian's physical and moral degradation. Basil's claim that "there is nothing in the world that art cannot express" is a homoerotically charged euphemism for what should read "there is nothing in the world I cannot express" (12). When Basil speaks of his fascination with Dorian to Lord Henry, he transfers his possessive desire of the portrait as an aesthetic study to a man whose

aesthetic interests rest with the city. Dorian, in turn, cannot help but feel drawn both to Lord Henry and to London as the self-proclaimed representations of “all the sins [Dorian] has not had the courage to commit,” and in so doing wish that his portrait would take on the effects of the life he leads in London (71). Many critics have commented upon the Victorian public’s condemnation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for “its distance from middle class life and because it was not only dandiacal, it was feminine” and its important place in contemporary gender studies “as depicting male interactions within a larger social formation that circulates ideologies defining differences in power across sex and class.”<sup>174</sup> What I would like to do is situate the text, both as dandiacal and feminine story and as a text from which gender criticism developed, within the visual context of the urban portrait. The charge running through statements like “he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair” or “You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr. Gray” creates the *enargeia* through which Wilde’s ekphrasis arises (17, 23). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* uses traits of masculine physical perfection to articulate a precise method of observation to the aesthetic potential resting in the innumerable sensory impressions available in the city.

Dorian’s ever-young physical appearance justifies the sort of sensory exploration advocated by Pater’s Preface to *The Renaissance*. Here the quest for “that special impression of beauty or pleasure,” and the need to “indicate what that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced” forms an imperative examination of the relationship between one’s actions in the city and one’s own disposition and a character (xxx). Lord Henry exhorts Dorian to “Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of

nothing”(23). He fashions the youth into the visible symbol of “a new Hedonism” which will invigorate fin de siècle life (23). The attractive forces shared between men in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* characterise aesthetic experience in the city. Male desire generates the *enargeia* powering Dorian’s eternal youth and the portrait’s ekphrastic representation of his sensory impressions of the city. Dorian’s alluring youth grants him access to the most refined sentiments in the seediest locales London has to offer. His beauty as a young man makes him the perfect symbol of a new “man of the laboratory” in the fin de siècle city who makes aesthetics into an experimental science.<sup>175</sup>

Lord Henry uses Dorian’s wanderings through East London “in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black, grassless squares” as a laboratory in which to evaluate the effects of impressionism on metropolitan experience (44). He observes his young friend with the cold detachment of a scientist observing an experiment: “He [Lord Henry] had been always enthralled by the methods of natural science, but the ordinary subject matter of that science had seemed to him trivial and of no import. And so he had begun by vivisecting himself, as he had ended by vivisecting others” (51). Not interested in the natural or physical world, but rather the social environment and forces of the city, Lord Henry vivisects Dorian, who subsequently vivisects his impressions of London, and then looks for the results in his painting. The portrait immediately and irrevocably channels both men’s desire to see life as an Art, as something to be cultivated and applied as a representation of oneself.



Dorian (and Lord Henry's) urban experiment has no room for the love and compassion Sybil Vane hopes she will find when Dorian visits her shabby, "absurd little theatre, with great flaring gas jets and gaudy playbills" (44). Her devotion to him, the "Prince Charming" of her dreams, is derided by the men's quest for perfect sensory experience. Dorian casts Sybil aside once his initial infatuation subsides and he no longer feels the excitement of love at first sight: "You used to stir my imagination, now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect" (77). In isolating the pleasure of love from the empathy of romance, Dorian is able to dissect his brief encounter with Sybil and then discard it. While this affair is but one of the several Dorian will have, it is the only one recounted to the reader. It provides the one glimpse into the physical geography of Dorian's urban escapades, and highlights the significance of the painting's power to ekphrastically manifest invisible and intangible impressions. Before locking the portrait away forever, Dorian stands before his picture and notes the "vicious cruelty that had marred the fine lines of the mouth" (92). The cruelty Dorian cannot and will not feel after breaking with Sybil arises in the portrait immediately after the dissipation of Dorian's first romance. Here, and nowhere else, is the relationship between Dorian's portrait's ekphrasis and Dorian's quest to immerse himself in the exquisite pleasure of urban stimuli more closely correlated:

Might there be some scientific reason for it all? If thought could exercise its influence upon a living organism, might not thought exercise an influence upon dead and inorganic things? Nay, without thought or conscious desire, might not things external to ourselves vibrate in unison with our moods and passions, atom calling to atom in secret love or strange affinity? (93)

The portrait is a litmus test for London life. It provides an empirical method for Dorian to analyse the city's impact on his personality in a clear, discrete, and quantifiable way, and thereby bring his awareness into the full presence of otherwise momentary sensory impressions. The moral implications of this test, however, are of no matter. Dorian believes the picture's increasingly altered features, though undeniably hideous, have no ethical bearing on the character of his London experiment. Indeed, Dorian doesn't want any secondary system to filter his primary engagement with the city; he wants to excite his senses, immediately enjoy them, and then dominate them (95). By continually exploiting his picture's ability to make a pictorial record of his exploits in London, Dorian hopes to emancipate himself from the effects of time. The portrait, "the most magical of mirrors," represents the eternal life attainable within the impression: "As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul, and when winter came upon it, he would still be standing where spring trembles on the verge of summer" (93). Dorian considers his body the ultimate painting of modern life, an urban body that has escaped both the past and the present to live forever in the present moment. His youth is the one impression that will never fade; its supreme experience grants access to all others. In Baudelairean terms, Dorian's youth takes on that eternal element of beauty, according to *The Painter of Modern Life's* historical theory of beauty, whose physical form has been made permanent, while all else fades away in the wasting effects of time.

And yet Dorian dies so twisted and aged that no one recognises him. The past catches up to him: "The consciousness of being hunted, snared, tracked down had begun to dominate him [. . .] There was something terribly logical in the imagination. It was the

imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of sin” (172). Though ever saved by the mask of youth, Time bears upon Dorian’s personality as old age bears upon an old man. The *enargeia* that changes his portrait causes him to see its degenerating face from afar and relive the memory of his first betrayal. Sybil Vane returns to Dorian’s life “out of the black cave of Time” when her brother James returns from Australia, tracks Dorian through London and into the countryside, and attempts to murder her Prince Charming as retribution for his sister’s suicide (173). Though shot before he can kill Dorian, James’ face appears to his intended victim “in the image of his [Dorian’s] sin” (173). The illusory modernity Dorian finds in youth catches the young hedonist out. His painted image has become an inescapable apparition haunting his unchanging figure, and it is the *enargeia* of attraction causes Dorian to see James Vane in a hallucination, even though he is already dead. The portrait’s colours reflect the omnipresence of time, functioning, as Baudelaire explains in *The Salon of 1846*:

According as the daystar alters its position, tones change their values, but, always respecting their natural sympathies and antipathies, they continue to live in harmony by making reciprocal concessions. Shadows slowly shift, and colours are put to flight before them, or extinguished all together, according as the light, itself shifting, may wish to bring new ones to life.<sup>176</sup>

Dorian, who has never reciprocated any of the emotion his portrait so vividly depicts, finds himself living on borrowed time. His youth has taken him out of sync with the city, for as sensory experience in the urban environment is ever-changing, Dorian’s face always

remains the same. As a result, his impressions of the city, as represented by the portrait, come to dominate him: “The tragedy of old age is not that one is old,” he laments to Lord Henry, “but that one is young” (186). Desiring no longer to make his life a work of art, Dorian lets the artifice of his youth fall by undoing the image of his urban experiment, the picture on which he projected the power of his personality. He slashes the painting with a knife, and so, Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill his consciousness of the city, and at that moment kills himself.<sup>177</sup>

### **III. Michael Field and Ekphrastic Identity**

From *The Picture of Dorian Gray*’s uncanny, ekphrastic context I would like to explore the implications of an ekphrasis that sees the work of art as having its own life, and further, a life which the artist might enter in. Very recently Ana Parejo Vadillo, Marion Thain, Jill Ehnenn, and Hilary Fraser have commented on Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper) as a poetic identity whose verse paintings inform strategies for articulating modernity in relation to gender and visuality, and the artist’s ability to enter the very world of the painted image. The following section will therefore discuss Field’s visual poetics as it pertains to the experience of art as a city during the fin de siècle. In so doing I hope to set up some of the particular strategies used to apply ekphrasis as a rhetorical method for translating images of city life into verse.

London was central to Michael Field’s poetic practice, as it sourced the museum art work through which Bradley and Cooper cultivated their ekphrastic practice as their cultural archive. Vadillo, for example, argues in *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*

(2005) that Michael Field's residences in Reigate, and then in Richmond, greater London, were absolutely central to Field's 1892 collection *Sight and Song*.<sup>178</sup> These thirty one poems translate pictures the women had seen in galleries in London and Continental Europe into poetry. Traveling between London and the suburbs and between England and the Continent allowed "for a particular experience of separation that led them to formulate a detached form of aesthetics that could give back to the object its intrinsic value, without the interference of the subject that was looking at it."<sup>179</sup> In addition, "Michael Field," as the single persona of lesbian poetic partnership, offers a model of visual consumption which affirms a multiplicity of viewers amongst Victorians and a range of ways for interpreting images.<sup>180</sup> These two traits of Field's work, their urban-suburban travel and the authorial partnership forged under one name are useful in that they allow Bradley and Cooper to imagine a poetics in which the poet, through verse, enters the realm of a painting. They give the art object an autonomous field of existence outside the artistic imagination, and thereby allow the viewing subject to incorporate him or herself into that field.

As their ekphrasis grows out of the city's ability to make a bounty of visual art available to the fine arts enthusiast, Michael Field's gallery-orientated writing practice is indebted to the metaphorical "man in the museum" guiding *The Painter of Modern Life*. Indeed, the poems collected in *Sight and Song* arise from Field's enthusiastic tour of Continental galleries led by Bernard Berenson, a close friend and art critic. *Sight and Song*, like the "man in the museum" follows a *modus operandi* peculiar to itself, and offers an important study of modernity because of its clear aim "to express not so much what these pictures are to the poet, but rather what poetry they objectively incarnate. Such an attempt

demands patient, continuous sight as pure as the gazer can refine it of theory, fancies, or his mere subjective enjoyment” (v). Paintings, according to *Sight and Song*, have their own life, and the artist must dutifully suppress critical judgments which might stifle that vitality. Field also identifies the artist’s precise function as a gazer, and as gazer the artist is more specifically a translator of the artwork’s internal poetics. Like Wilde, Bradley and Cooper build upon Pater’s *The Renaissance*. However, they do so by shifting the emphasis Pater places upon sensory phenomenon as discrete elements separated by the physiological differences of the body’s sensing organs to a conceptualization of sensory experience as a self-substantiating holistic spectrum. In “The School of Giorgione” Pater argues against critical methods which seek to conflate sense perception into one holistic faculty in no uncertain terms:

It is the mistake of much popular criticism to regard poetry, music, and painting – all the various products of art—as but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought [. . .] The sensuous material of each art brings with it a special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other, and order of impressions distinct in kind—is the beginning of all true aesthetic criticism. (83)

This passage suggests proper aesthetic study depends upon a clear categorization of the imaginative faculties based on easily discernable differences in sound, sight, and speech. Field, in contrast, holistically groups art forms around their common ability to generate impressions themselves, which are then transmitted to the viewer. For Bradley and

Cooper, art objects, regardless of form, generate their own visual field. Thus, urban experience exists regardless of the *flâneur* and the urban explorer's activities. The city cannot be dominated by someone like Dorian Gray, because for Michael Field, the city is not subordinate to the sensing subject.

Cooper and Bradley used the new technological forces of the modern city to interact with art. First domestic train travel between English collections at the National Gallery and Hampton Court, followed by visits to Continental art galleries including the Louvre, the Accademia of Venice, the Accademia of Bologna, the Uffizi, the Campo Santo at Pisa, the Accademia of Florence, the Dresden Gallery, and the Grand Duke's Gallery at Weimar, created a triangular system of creation in which the urban gallery, as art archive, supplied the material through which Michael Field generated the poetic system underpinning *Sight and Song*. Vadillo has shown how train travel between museums and galleries in urban centres, and their own suburban homes in Reigate and Richmond, allowed for a triangular system of creation that dissociated the act of seeing from the subject who is seeing, and this allowed Field to "give back to the object its intrinsic value, without the interference of the subject that was looking at it."<sup>181</sup> Thus, by shifting away from Wilde's depiction of London as an environment for sensory experimentation in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Sight and Song* allows London's art objects to translate themselves into verse through the fruits of the city's own technology.<sup>182</sup> In combining traditional museum going with a scopic technique derived from urban mass transport, Field ingeniously devises a rhetorical ekphrasis where *enargeia* exists a priori in the art object. The object transports itself to an audience while the speaker remains isolated from the object's incarnate energy. Art, according to *Sight and Song*, makes itself visible. Further,

in writing as a lesbian duo, Cooper and Bradley not only locate *enargeia* in the ekphrastic object, but allow that *enargeia* to create “speaking spaces” within a painting where poetic translation occurs.<sup>183</sup> Instead of using ekphrasis to dominate the impression as Dorian Gray does, Michael Field’s speaker submits to it.

*Sight and Song* begins with Watteau’s *L’Indifferent* (1717), which they saw while visiting the Louvre. The placement of the poem is significant, in that it establishes early on their revision of Pater’s sensorial epistemology in “The School of Giorgione” through a technique acquired by using London as both an archive of visual images, and as the transportational means for accessing that archive. The title of the artwork alludes to Field’s more ambivalent attitude towards experiencing the aesthetic, namely their indifference to the subjective mind’s ability to parse and categorise sensory phenomena.<sup>184</sup> Instead of emphasising an environment through which the senses move, Field highlights the mobility inherent in the Parisian painting. The dancer in *L’Indifferent* moves completely of its own accord. Just as the city provides the means through which Cooper and Bradley move between museums and galleries, here the city provides the material trough which they develop their poetic technique:

He dances on a toe

As light as Mercury’s:

Sweet herald, give thy message! No,

He dances on; the world is his,



The sunshine on his wingy hat;  
His eyes are round  
Beneath the brim:  
To merely dance where he is found  
Is fate to him  
And he was born for that  
  
He dances in a cloak  
Of vermeil and of blue:  
Gay youngster, underneath the oak,  
Come, laugh and love! In vain we woo;  
He is a human butterfly;--  
No soul, no kiss  
No glance, no joy!  
Though old enough for manhood's bliss  
He is a boy  
Who dances and must die. (1-20)

Clearly, the speaker is most interested in a painting that has something to say for itself. "Sweet herald, give thy message" the spectator cries (1). The boy in the painting gives no answer, however, too occupied in his dance to respond. Instead, the boy replies through body language and his kinetic energy provides the *enargeia* to bring the spectator inside

the poem. It is as if the locomotive energy that brings Field to the city also moves Field into the painted environment.

The trains transporting Cooper and Bradley between galleries in London and on the Continent power their ekphrasis. On a geographic level, Field, as speaking subject, gains immediate, intimate contact with the object of their interest: the museum. On a poetic level, Field's verse arrives as the inertia of train travel transfers into the coordinated movements of the dancer and the speaker. Interestingly, these movements insinuate an erotic awareness of the dancer's masculinity; the spectator makes a sexual assessment of the dancer, who "Though old enough for manhood's bliss, / He is a boy" (18-19). The dancer exhibits a lasting youth similar to that of Dorian Gray; for both Field's poem and Wilde's book, the male body takes on the forces of the city to include the speaker within the "speaking space" of a painting. It is as if the dancer's movements provide a kinetic energy that allows the spectator to ventriloquise his meaning. The dancer moves his body into a position of display, which the speaker then sees while sharing the dancer's movements. By participating in the dance, the speaker locates the poem in the eye of the moving picture's urban energy.<sup>185</sup>

*Sight and Song* gives the reader a vivid impression of the visual components of the painting as it is rendered into verse. The technique Bradley and Cooper use to channel the dancer's movement into a textual voice is broken down step by step. The reader sees the speaker fall under the spell of the painting, and subsequently moves into its scheme of action. "L'Indifferent" details the paintings surface and interiority and in doing so

repudiates the observer's power to fetishise the art object through the gaze.<sup>186</sup> Writing from within the picture, instead of holding an impression of the picture in their minds, allows Michael Field to combine the dynamic aspects of a verse enabled by train travel with the static nature of the painted image. Their writing taps the energy of the dancer, otherwise held in situ by physical aspects of frame and canvas. Additionally, because painting is a medium defined by spatial organization, it is more suited to representing visual impressions at a single moment in time. Because of this, Bradley and Cooper "enter into the paradox of ekphrasis through their desire to translate the qualities of the mode of artistic representation, the painting's expressive qualities, into their verse."<sup>187</sup> I would like to combine Marion Thain's argument that the project of translation within *Sight and Song* is akin to synaesthesia, "a more complete apprehension of something designed for one sense through another sensory channel" with the "transparency" concept Vadillo draws from Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator."<sup>188</sup> Here the translation "does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully."<sup>189</sup> Synthesising these two arguments brings Michael Field's work out the museum and into the urban landscape.

Instead of relying on an economy of separation between the suburban space where Field wrote *Sight and Song*, and the city, where Bradley and Cooper found and studied paintings for their ekphrastic project, poetry becomes a translation of urban motion. *Sight and Song* reinforces the medium of its production by using, as Baudelaire did, synaesthetic effects that,

provide a broader temporal sweep, adding a narrative of events before and after the scene depicted to make up of the lack of richness in detail [in the painting] [. . . .] Cooper and Bradley bring something of the perfect, still, moment of art into a world of language governed by temporality.<sup>190</sup>

Thain shows here how Field's verse translation of Botticelli's *Spring*, for example, identifies the viewer's subjectivity with that of Venus, the painting is subsequently present as a drama directed by its central character and not the spectator, and that this drama enables the transition between language and spectacle.<sup>191</sup> They seem to "create timeless icons in the very medium that seems bound most irrevocably to time."<sup>192</sup> Field's reading of *Spring* uses the temporal progression of emotion – here weeping – to substantiate the represented environment. Venus' sadness colours the whole painting.<sup>193</sup>

Just as *Sight and Song* is in one sense a return to Baudelaire and an expression of his modernity, I would now like to return to a discussion of the city itself. The influence of French decadence upon English painters not only returned them to classical techniques of representation like ekphrasis, but in doing so led them inevitably to the city as the primary field of that representation. While painters like Frith used urban imagery to narrate didactic, morally centred lessons on social order, writers and poets like Wilde and Field use the city to de-centre subjectivity to locate new authority in the painted image's ability for self-expression. In so doing, they build upon Pater's paradoxical notion of the ever-fleeting, ever-refinable impression while also exposing the flaws in Pater's theory and suggesting suitable alternatives. However, Wilde and Field only use the city insofar as it

provides them with a way to interpret secondary images. Though the city mediates their writing, the city is not immediately apparent in either the painted impressions of London in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or the verse-images taken from urban galleries in *Sight and Song*. Both works speak of the city, but neither work speaks the city itself. With this in mind, the following section will discuss Arthur Symons' craft through its application of ekphrasis directly on London while within it. Inspired by Whistler's *Nocturnes*, Symons' poetry uses impressionist techniques to map London around spaces of haze and shadow. Images illuminated through light distorted by either cigarette smoke, theatre lights, or street lamps allow Symons to delve into a secret city, a place with its own joyful and sorrowful mysteries.<sup>194</sup>

#### **IV. Arthur Symons and Decadence: Ekphrasis, Impressionism, Symbolism**

Richard le Gallienne, in his review of *Illustrations of Tennyson* by Churton Collins (1892) encapsulates Wilde and Field's respective enquiries into the relationship between literature, vision, and the metropolis into a neat catch phrase : *la maladie fin-de-siècle*. Le Gallienne precisely identifies "the euphuistic expression of isolated observation" as that stylistic phenomenon that brings verse towards a new maturity of expression.<sup>195</sup>

Decadence uses sight as a way to distinguish the simple existence of a poetic subject from that subject's identification in society: "Thus disease, which is a favourite theme of the decadents, does not in itself make for decadence: it is only when [. . .] it is studied apart from its relation to health" (135). Vision, as poetic style, advocates an appreciation for pure existence. It is as if decay, for the decadents, means the decay of dualism and the deterioration of comparison based judgment. The visual poetics of decadence instead

makes for a vital literature “considered in all its relation to the sum total of things, to the Infinite [. . .] in decadent literature, the due proportions are ignored” (134).

The condition of literature in England, according to le Gallienne, must be revised through a close association between distinct visual, literary, and spiritual practices. Following this, Symons, in “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (1893), identifies two distinct stands of decadence: artistic enquiries interested in the impression as a mental faculty and artistic enquiries that use the impression as a way of accessing a deeper, more enigmatic and esoteric consciousness. The impressionist and the symbolist work under the same hypothesis, though applied in different directions:

Both seek not general truth, merely, but *la vérité vraie*, the very essence of truth – the truth of appearances to the senses, of the visible world to the eyes that see it; and the truth of spiritual things to the spiritual vision. The Impressionist, in literature as in painting, would flash upon you in a new, sudden way so exact an image of what you have just seen, as you have seen it, that you may say [. . .] on seeing for the first time a picture of [James McNeill] Whistler’s, “Whistler seems to think his picture upon canvas—and there it is!’ (137).

The wording of this passage bespeaks a keen insight into Whistler’s actual painting practice. As shown in chapter two, Whistler cultivates a technique which fuses pictorial memory with the imagination to harmonise subjective remembrance with empirical perception. This practice transmits the artist’s internal perception of the viewed object as a

discrete image within the observed world. The Thames in *Nocturne in Blue and Silver – Chelsea* (1871), for example, arranges the city according to the artist's perception of colour. Whistler, by combining memory with the immediacy of imagination, exposes a previously hidden environment from within the geography of the city. The city appears as an image in soft focus, "a bright focused center of meaning together with a penumbra of vagueness that is intrinsically ineradicable" to suggest an imperceptible boundary between the imaginary and the real.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, the entire *Nocturne* series, of which *Blue and Silver – Chelsea* is a part, is representative of a mnemonic system used out of practical necessity, as means for creating a vivid mental picture of the Thames that could be translated into painted colour in the studio.<sup>197</sup> The designation of such paintings as "Nocturnes," a term originally coined by Frederick Leyland, likens Whistler's practice to an ekphrastic rendering of the city operating as an aesthetic environment. The *Nocturne* paintings combine colours in much the same way Chopin's *Nocturne* piano music combines notes into chord progressions on the keyboard. *Nocturne in Blue and Silver – Chelsea* is an ekphrastic arrangement that delivers Whistler's visual memory of life on London's river to the observer's ability to observe, on canvas, the ephemeral effects of light on the Thames at night. A "Nocturne," for Whistler, is, first and foremost, "an arrangement of line, form, and colour."<sup>198</sup> Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, and now Symons, have their own arrangements of the city, which arrive through the lines and forms of ekphrastic poetry and prose.

Symons uses his awareness of Whistler's impressionism to present London as a sacred site. Images like Whistler's, and as I will later show, poems like Symons', view the metropolis from within. They "smile secretly in their corner [. . .] They watch and wait,

and when you are near they seem to efface themselves [. . .] They choose you, you do not choose them” (85). A Whistler painting initiates the viewer into a transformative process of “Londonisation” by evoking a vision of itself within its very streets.<sup>199</sup> By describing the effects of looking at images of the Thames painted from the river’s very banks, Symons identifies a technique in which memory and imagination merge into one primary image, which he then uses to make good on his earlier imperative in *Days and Nights* to,

Go where cities pour

Their turbid human stream through art and mart

A dark stream flowing onward evermore

Down to an unknown ocean; -- there is Art

and further, to explicate his close, personal association with the city as a writer of poetry.

The second edition of *Silhouettes*, published originally in 1892 and re-released in 1896 with a new preface, links the theory of “The Decadent Movement in Literature” to actual poetic production in the urban environment. The Preface responds to a critical comment made about “unwholesome” verses which had “a faint smell of Patchouli about them” (95). This fragrance, commonly used in incense, characterises what Symons calls his “concern with the artificially charming, which I suppose is what my critic means about Patchouli” (95). As the Preface continues, the scent of Patchouli becomes a means for the city writer to equate nature and artifice and ask, “Is there any reason in nature why we



should write exclusively about the natural blush if the delicately acquired blush of rouge has any attraction for us? Both exist: both, I think, are charming in their own way” (96). Artifice in this respect sheds its typical association with something fake, false or contrived, and products of the man-made world gain equal footing with the organic world have in the realm of experience. Both are real, both exist, and there is no reason why one should exclude the other. Town, not country, excites the poet for one simple reason: novelty. The city gives the poet a chance to write about relatively unexamined subject matter which though somewhat scarce in poetry, surrounds millions of residents. Interestingly, Symons here writes as a Londoner first and an artist second. For him, and other Londoners:

In the town we have to find ourselves, as best we may, the décor which is the town equivalent of the great natural décor of fields and hills. Here it is that artificiality comes in: and if anyone sees no beauty in the effects of artificial light, in all the variable, most human, and yet most factitious town landscape, than I can only pity him, and go on my way. (97)

Through Whistler, Symons elucidates how the impression, when artistically expressed takes the observer beyond the limits of physiological vision and mental perception. Just as Whistler flashes his painting on the canvas, “the Symbolist [. . .] would flash upon you the ‘soul’ of that which can only be apprehended by the soul—the finer sense of things unseen, the deeper meaning of things evident” (137). “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” when seen in light of *Days and Nights* and *Silhouettes*, articulates the spiritual energy of the city and that energy’s power to engulf the observer. It advocates the artist’s

ability to observe a potential energy within the urban environment while also placing that observer at the mercy of the city.

Wilde and Field use ekphrasis to access the world of art. Dorian Gray uses his portrait as a way to fashion his life into artwork. His painted image allows for uninhibited emotional experimentation and provides a way to control the results of that experiment. The speaker in *Sight and Song* uses pictures as a way to open the painted environment to a process of poetic translation. Ekphrasis allows these writers to observe the work of art as an immediate, intimate experience. Yet for both of them, ekphrasis becomes a way to manipulate the image's environment; it ultimately subjects art to their visual control. Symons consciously avoids this by identifying his artistic interest in the city itself, not a painted image of urban experience or an urban experience that opens an artistic environment. The city simply is the artistic environment. Thus, while Michael Field consciously elide their consciousness of the gallery, and their place in it as subjective observers, Symons, in *Silhouettes*, allows the city's artificial light to translate itself into verse.

In "Pastel: Masks and Faces," for example, the artificial light of a burning cigarette operates as the sole focal point in poem. The verses continue only through their ability to render visible light from within the versified environment. The first stanza, "The light of our cigarettes / went and came in the gloom : / It was dark in the little room" frames the entire poem as a scopic event (1-3). Nothing is visible except the smoking end of a cigarette, the sight of which draws the reader into the poem at the very moment the speaker

inhales a breath of smoke. Together in the dark, the speaker and the reader both perceive an intense illumination as the burning cigarette brightens when the speaker inhales from it: “Dark, and then, in the dark, / Sudden, a flash, a glow, / And a hand and a ring I know” (4-6). The rapid counterpoint between dark and light builds into a brief, yet intense vision of a bejeweled, disembodied hand. As light from the cigarette refracts across the surface of the ring, the room brightens from the inside out; slowly the poem continues into the final stanza and two subjects are brought into relief. The red light spreads softly, “And then, through the dark, a flush / Ruddy and vague” to reveal “the grace / (A rose!) of her lyric face” (7-9). The burning light exposes the tone and outline of a face while simultaneously superimposing itself onto the supplementary colour of red, embarrassed cheeks to create the illusory image of a rose. Reading “Pastel: Masks and Faces” is an exercise in vision, in following the trajectory of light as it spreads out across a room and across three stanzas of verse. The viewing audience reads the poem by the internal light of the lit cigarette; reader and speaker see by the same light. The remembered poem, written in past tense, becomes the centre of the reader’s present experience and through this effect, their perception of the light merge into one shared image.

The cloaked presence of a phantom city within London enables “Pastel: Masks and Faces” to fuse the perceptions of speaker and reader. Symons’ poem bespeaks the metropolis’ power to enclose itself around an individual, to confuse the spectator by superimposing itself over his or her field of vision. Reading the poem places the reader directly in the city, as located by the artificial light of a burning cigarette. The reader does not find himself, the city finds him. By correlating the symbolist experience to a work by Whistler, and then using that argument to revise the preface to *Silhouettes*, Symons

provides a clear example of how the “artificial” urban environment becomes the very seat of perceptual experience. Simply by existing, the city maps itself out to its initiates and this revelation is reproduced by symbolist poetry. Similar to Whistler’s *Nocturnes*, Symons’ poetry physically manifests according to sparks, flashes, and burning embers of city objects. The urban environment casts its own light. I would like to explore the implications of Symons’ poetry in such a context, as verse produced of and by a city where “The whole visible world itself [. . .] is but a symbol, made visible in order that we must apprehend ourselves, and not be blown hither and thither like a flame in the night.”<sup>200</sup>

The poems arranged into *London Nights* (1895, 1897) offer a glimpse into the mental state through which the poet accesses the secret symbolist city. From the collections preface, it seems a matter of synchronising one’s internal emotional responses to the stream of external life: “whatever has been a mood of mine, through it has been no more than a ripple on the sea, and no longer then a ripple’s duration, I claim the right to render, if I can, in verse” (166). Here the flash of symbolist experience in a poem like “Pastel: Masks and Faces” is explained through a process in which time and space compress around the impression. For Symons, transforming the mood of the city into “the moment’s monument of a poem” involves a sort of pause, or stasis (166). Verse translates a remembered impression though the permanence of the physical world he observes from within a present moment. Symons uses ekphrastic rhetorical techniques on himself. He brings the city to his immediate visual attention and then watches the light of the urban environment engulf him. Through inner-city ekphrasis powered by the *enargeia* of artificial light, the symbolist metropolis surfaces from the material of the city street. The preface shows us how the symbolic world lies embedded in physical reality. Its watery

ripples give us a sense of the double vision Symons practices and offers an understanding of the symbolist movement as a practice that renders ephemeral sensory moments into enduring and stable visions of an imaginative ideal as represented by the real world. Symons provides a way out of cyclic impressionism. Urban ekphrasis allows images of everyday life to shift between physical stimulus, memory, and imagination and thereby evoke a London where the past and the future fold into one another in real time.

*London Nights* brings Baudelaire's theatre of modernity to England by examining the metropolis first on a large scale and then offering smaller, more precise images of urban life. It provides a verse environment that answers Baudelaire's longing in *The Painter of Modern Life* for,

a play in which we shall see a resurrection of those costumes in which our fathers found themselves every bit as fascinating as we do ourselves in poor garments. And then, if they are worn and given life by intelligent actors and actresses, we shall be astonished at ever having been able to mock them so stupidly. Without losing anything of its ghostly attraction, the past will recover the light and movement of life and will become present. (2)

"Prologue: Before the Curtain" explicates "the ghostly attraction" of the modern city by considering London life as something performed on stage, its residents "the puppets of a shadow play" in which the roles of the past repeat themselves in the present (1). "There's no speech in all desire, nor any idle word, / Men have not said and women have not heard"

(5-7). But the curtain also rises; there is a world beyond the boundary of everyday life into which Londoners cross when they become so absorbed in the city that they become blind to it as an external reality. *London Nights* arranges itself around such events. Its verses articulate the gestures Londoners use to illuminate the invisible city once the material world disappears:

When the lights fade  
Before our feet, and the obscure abyss  
Opens, and darkness falls about our eyes,  
'Tis only that some momentary rage  
Or rapture blinds us to forget the stage,  
Like the wise actor, most in this thing wise.  
We pass and have our gesture; (11- 17)

The two poems that follow in my analysis provide specific examples of the theatrical city. “Prologue: Before the Curtain” and “Nora on the Pavement” use dance as the medium through which inner city ekphrasis illuminates the symbolist city. Just as Baudelaire theorises about the theatre to understand urban modernity, Symons uses the street and stage as a sites to observe those gestures which elucidate the poetic expression of an ideal city accessible once its transient forms have fallen away.

The collection begins with a second “Prologue” that zooms in upon the urban observer who functions as a guide for the reader. Its poetic account of “how my life is like

a music hall” conceptualises theatrical performance, especially dance, as a way to disrupt a traditionally working-class art form’s appropriation by middle class audiences (1). During the fin de siècle, English music hall entertainment, which incorporated sketch comedy, dance, and animal demonstrations had begun drawing a broad base of middle-class patrons, and as a result was quickly becoming an art form acceptable to mass culture. The music hall, in Symons’ poem however, reclaims the variety show from societal enfranchisement. “To study the individuality of the music hall,” he writes, “as one studies human individuality, that is by no means the least profitable, the least interesting of human studies.”<sup>201</sup> The dancer provides a study in how human life operates along an economy of performance between actor and spectator. Theatre, in this sense, provides a space in which performers assert themselves against the viewership of a mass audience.

Through their various acts, the dancers, comedians, and wild animal tamers manipulate the scopic environment in which they work. They incorporate a tactic de Certeau identifies as “la perruque” (the wig) in which a worker disguises his own work as that of his employer.<sup>202</sup> This tactic allows performers to turn the material of their profession to their own ends through the camp theatricality of the music hall. Symons, as an aficionado of music hall culture, assists in smuggling the dancer’s choreographed movements across carefully patrolled borders of middle class taste and respectability.<sup>203</sup> The dance number Symons finds so fascinating confounds ocular consumption by reflecting the gazing audience’s attention. The dancer thus forces the viewer’s eye back on itself: “I see myself upon the stage / Dance to amuse a music hall”, says the speaker in “Prologue” (5-6). “It is my very self I see / Across the cloudy cigarette” (9-10). Symons is a camp intellectual; his writing speaks neither for the dominant order nor for the organic

expert.<sup>204</sup> His spectatorship is marked by a self-conscious awareness of how his two instruments of leisure, the cigarette and the dance, screen his perception. The smoke reflects the stage lighting back onto the speaker, who remembers that he sits before the eyes of the dancer just as the dancer performs before him. The dusty particles lit by the stage lights equalise the ocular perspectives of speaker and dancer.<sup>205</sup> The speaker realises that he too is a performer and enters into an interior debate on his awareness of the material world. The poem bears witness to the rhetorical doubling of the ekphrastic process. The speaker sees himself on stage not because he effaces his subjectivity, but because the dancer appropriates the agents of his leisure activity. She meets his gaze, her stage-lit dance reflects across his smoking cigarette, and so his interior position as an audience member unfolds into a larger environment. The theatre expands outwards into the city itself, and the speaker finds himself acting, his poetic commentary a stage within the city.

Likewise, “Nora on the Pavement” capably discerns the potential energies lingering within the spaces of the dance. The poem uses ballet as a metaphor to perform a stable representation of how the city stages the symbolic, and thereby examines two processes: how a dancer uses movement to merge with the city, and second, how the observation of that movement in streetlight to perform an ekphrastic operation. The speaker’s desire forms the backdrop around which his vicarious observation of the dance forms “a footlight fancy” (10). However, this desire has little to do with a fetishistic appropriate of the female body. It has been claimed that Symons “cultivates an urban romance, staging himself as the virile hero who sees the essence of London in the women who move through its streets and dance in its music halls”; however, close reading of the poem shows a dancer resistant



to the effects of an observer who would transform materiality into artifice to control an feminine landscape by enclosing it within his own desirous gaze.<sup>206</sup> Nora appears in her own time: “As Nora on the pavement / Dances, and she entrances the grey hour / into the laughing circle of her power” (1-3). In these first three lines the rhythm of her movements disrupts chronological progression with something more organic. Nora moves within the circles of her own power, and so the poem, fixated on her dance, flows according to its rhythm only. Further, “The magic circle of her glances” imbues the poem with her urban presence (4). If anything, the poem constructs “a mental map of London marked by fragmentation, complexity, and introspection, all of which imperil the *flâneur*’s ability to experience the city as a totalising force.”<sup>207</sup> The movement of Nora’s roving gaze through the street shapes the poem’s verse. Nora’s danced observation immerses the speaker in her personal London.

The dancer controls her audience who, “Petulant and bewildered,” cannot control himself as “Thronging desires and longing recur, / and memorably re-incarnate her” (11-13). The speaker loses himself within the measured steps of his subject. His memory of Nora as a music hall performer shifts in time to Nora’s real presence on the street. The kinetic energy of the dance exacts “That old longing, / A footlight fancy” from the poet and translates it into “the laughing circle of her power” to position Nora in two times: on the street and in the theatre of memory (9-10, 3). Indeed, the “footlight fancy” Nora draws from the speaker illuminates her presence in the poem, while also providing the medium through which she becomes fully aware of the city taking shape in the forms of her ballet. Nora uses the speaker’s remembered desire to mediate a spatial transformation.<sup>208</sup>

But what are these dance measures,  
Leaping and joyous, keeping time alone  
With Life's capricious rhythm and hers, long sleeping,  
That wakes, and knows not why, in these dance measures? (16-20)

The space and time of her dance inserts itself into the occasion of the speaker's observation and comes to symbolise an expansion of consciousness, an awakening after which Nora finds herself not only "entrancing the gray hour" but also living fully in it. Interestingly enough, the poem answers the speaker's question. Nora's dance tricks Symons' position as writer. The dance he observes eludes poetic definition on his part because Nora has distorted his memory from within. The danced space Nora creates around her image ruptures the speaker's ability to conceive the poem. Nora, from the space of memory, eludes immediate perception. Nora on the pavement sheds her street identity to become "innocently spendthrift of herself / And guileless and most unbeguiled, Herself at last, leaps free the very Nora" (27-30).

*London Nights'* theatrical poetics blurs the split between the objective material world and imaginative consciousness. "Nora on the Pavement," manipulates remembered images to produce a synergy of poetic subject and object very similar to the mnemonic art of Constantin Guys theorised in *The Painter of Modern Life* and executed in "Carrion" in *The Flowers of Evil*. The crisis of memory and oblivion Baudelaire observes in Paris, when placed in London, interprets not only the letting go of material reality in favour of the spiritual, but the realisation of the spiritual within the material and the material within

the spiritual. To become modern, argued Symons, poetry must respond to the experience of the city. And it was London Symons had in mind and sought consistently to model his new prose and verse. However, it is worth remembering that the first touchstone for Symons, as it was for Whistler and Swinburne, was not London, but Paris.<sup>209</sup> In 1899 Symons published the landmark *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, a revised version of “The Decadent Movement in Literature.” Here he draws on his friendship with French poets Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé to focus on poets whose poetic techniques blend the infinite is made to blend itself with the finite, to stand visible, as if it were attainable there.<sup>210</sup> Symons’ essays in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* reveal a close artistic association between the poems in *Silhouettes* and *London Nights*, Verlaine’s *Art Poétique*, and Mallarmé’s *Heriodiade*. Mallarmé praised Symons subtle translation of his work, writing on 12 January 1897:

Yes, my dear poet, I have received and perused, and I am now familiar with your priceless translation of the *Heriodiade*. It seems to me, and there, indeed, I am being quite presumptuous, that I have written it in English myself. How could you have transposed certain things from that Poesie, the very tone itself?<sup>211</sup>

Symons echoes Mallarmé’s idea of dance “as the model of a language of praxis, in which the self is revealed by the capacity of the sign to demonstrate the dialectic of its own creation.”<sup>212</sup> Symons moves between the presentations of Nora to show how London holds his poetic imagination and his poetic text in double time; the leap of a dance reveals the interpenetrating spectrum of act and imagination inherent in the symbolic movement of

Symons' writing the city. "Nora on the Pavement" echoes Mallarmé's essay "L'action restreinte" in that the occupation of writing transforms reverie into physical act.<sup>213</sup> Art here "includes the material body and the metaphysical [. . .] to accomplish this ideal, he develops representations of a dancing body that inhabits space and time infinitely."<sup>214</sup> Dance, then, is an ideal medium for advocating "a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream" (*The Symbolist Movement in Literature* 2-3). The dancer asserts the artist's ability to articulate the condition of modern existence in the city through an emblem of visibility and movement.

Up to this point I have traced the influence of a Parisian poetic sensibility imagined by Charles Baudelaire on English poets and the ways these poets translate French Baudelareian modernity into an English poetics. Algernon Charles Swinburne's translations and adaptations of Sapphic poetry prefigure ways in which late nineteenth century poets see the city as a text accessible through the literary arts. Swinburne's interior vision looks through Sappho's body of texts via a modernity operational through, I argue, the *camera obscura* model of visual representation. The *camera obscura* allows Swinburne to use the violent energies of Sapphic poems like "Anactoria" to harness the potential energies bound up in intersex states. Ekphrastic poems like "Hermaphroditus" in the *Poems and Ballads* series catalyse the sexual energy of the intersex body to allow for an "alchemical" or metaphysical reading of the art object.

Swinburne's ekphrastic sensibility in "Hermaphroditus" signals a growing trend amongst late nineteenth century artists in using classical sources as a way of

reconceptualising reality, especially in the urban environment. Chapter three has examined the application of ekphrastic rhetoric in the urban writings of Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, and Arthur Symons as a reaction to the growing influence of science, technology, and empirical thought on urban culture. Ekphrasis enables these writers to access and textually map an invisible city via the visual energy they generate by moving through it. Dorian Gray offloads the effects of physical aging and moral depravity by channelling his friends' homosocial desire into his portrait; Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, under the collective pseudonym "Michael Field," use commuter trains as a way to access the city's archive of aesthetic culture and thereby express a world of living art in their ekphrastic collection *Sight and Song*; Arthur Symons uses ekphrasis to split fin de siècle decadence into the separate but related branches of impressionism and symbolism. Drawing on his intimate acquaintances with French poets Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, Symons' essay "The Decadent Movement in Literature" and his poetry collections *London Nights* and *Silhouettes* describe the how spaces illuminated by city light might draw the poet into an alternate realm beyond the conventionally seen city.

Symons' application of French aesthetics in *London Nights*, and his critical reception of a specific Symbolist movement in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* articulates the close alliance Symons' saw between his poetry and French modernity. The Symbolist movement lays important groundwork for subsequent explorations into the visual impact of the modern city on artistic life in the twentieth century.<sup>215</sup> Consequently, the following chapter examines the applicability of symbolist poetics to actual urban experience and investigates the actual parity between the poetical city and the city itself. Symons' knowledge and reception of French poets like Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul

Verlaine is particularly applicable here, in that while Symons takes pains to explicate these artists' practices in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* he also questions their quest for that "unseen world." Chapter four will present Symons' uncertainty through a case study of his short story "Christian Trevalga," and from this study expose the gaps in the symbolist "dream city" to re-direct readings of the city away from an aesthetic of spiritual emancipation or escape and towards the city itself. Urban modernity need not lead us out of the seen world, but rather more deeply into the city's ceaseless motion, its dazzling lights, and disorientating noise.

## Chapter Four: From Symbolist Spaces to the Urban Temporalities

This fourth chapter will examine Symons' reception of a French Symbolist poetics and how this reception negotiates the tireless motion of the urban environment, as represented by crowds, traffic, noise, and lights in relation to the theoretical writings of Georg Simmel, Henri Bergson, and T.E. Hulme. Whereas chapter three shows how ekphrasis might offer access to an invisible, eternal city by combining the spatial paradigms of visual arts with the timed rhythms of urban writing, my aim here is to interrogate the applicability of Symons' symbolism through a direct engagement with the city itself. Instead of stopping the city, and finding a unique timeless reality through the urban, as Symons attempts to do, how might poetry better visualise the city as a something loud, dazzling, and disorientating? The following analyses will outline Symons' understanding of French poetics in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) in the fin de siècle and how concepts like "the nuance" and "moments of crisis arrested in mid-flight" in some ways limit and even endanger one's capacity to cope with the city in the first years of the twentieth century, while simultaneously opening new avenues for expression.

Georg Simmel's essays "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) and "The Philosophy of Money" (1900) link the metropolis to an economy of continual exchange. These two pieces offer a useful philosophical backdrop for assessing *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* against T.E. Hulme's unpublished essay "Cinders," (1905) written six years after Symons' work, as "essentially imperfect, chaotic, and cinder-like" (9).

Hulme, noted by many critics as the forefather of literary modernism, considered reality a mass assemblage of fragments, or “cinders” which the mind organises from chaos into the ordered environment known conventionally as reality. Visuality plays a key role here; the light sources that illuminate a neatly ordered urban environment also reveal a more dynamic reality characterised more by flux than stasis and stability. Hulme’s rhetorical question, “Why is it that London looks pretty by night? Because for the general cindery chaos there is a substituted simple ordered arrangement of a finite number of lights,” points us toward the possibility that London, in and of itself, is the higher reality the Symbolist poets seek (10). Instead of housing node-like and symbolic gateways to a separate, higher plain of consciousness, the metropolis houses an alternate reality within itself, and provides the means for accessing this realm through its swirling assemblage of fragments. Further, Hulme’s fascination with Henri Bergson’s radical re-conception of time, space, and perception as states of consciousness will prove especially pertinent in its re evaluation of perception as a qualitative factor of consciousness, rather than a quantitative factor of cognition. Bergson’s exploration into how consciousness accounts for sensation in terms of affectation and feeling and ultimately, points towards a conception of consciousness as time, a “real duration” independent of space.<sup>216</sup>

Such large and cryptic terms like “cinders” and “duration” point towards a more specific artistic movement, in which the symbolic capacity of a word is found inadequate. Words no longer substantiate the objects to which they try to refer. Symons, Simmel, Bergson, and Hulme together consider how urban writing might allow for a vision-based language that finds meaning in images rather than the semantic collection of words in standard sentences. Words are to be “as an image seen and not as a counter.”<sup>217</sup> My



interest here is in how poetic experiments in vision and urban representation intersect with contemporary philosophical enquiry; what Hulme calls in *Notes on Language and Style* (1907), “a constant movement above and below the line of meaning (representation)” bears out a more detailed analysis of how artists and philosophers in the city handle an urban environment awash with a multiplicity of things – cars, trams, crowds, shops, commodities, advertisements.<sup>218</sup>

## **I. Symbols, Words, Time**

Published in 1899, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* has two goals. First, as the title implies, it provides an introduction to a specific school or circle of writers, and second, uses those writers to comment upon the configuration of visible reality through the dynamics of language. Symons begins with a straightforward equation: symbols are words. Without symbolism,

there can be no literature; indeed, not even language. What are words themselves but symbols, almost as arbitrary as the letters which compose them [. . .]

Symbolism began with the first words uttered by the first man, as he named every living thing; or before them, in heaven, when God named the world into being (1).

So, at bare bones, this “Symbolist Movement” is concerned with the way in which mankind, from its inception, named the living environment as it appeared. It is the movement of the physical world into a linguistic system of visual signs, or names, which

can be written down and read aloud. On a more esoteric level, this “symbolist movement” is a form of religion, a way of contacting or accessing the divine through the shared practices of naming and writing. God named the world, and so did his human creations. Thus, a person should theoretically be able to achieve some sort of a shared awareness between him or herself and Godhead through language. Symons hopes *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* will introduce his English readers to certain French authors of his acquaintance who tried to access some aspect of the Absolute through their poetics, and in doing so enumerate the techniques through which they tried to achieve their goal.

Poets Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and the other “Symbolist” writers included in *The Symbolist Movement* seem, in Symons eyes, somewhat infallible and unflappable. These writers seek a higher power through literature, and if the Biblical parable of Adam and Eve from the collection’s preface is correct, then they are certainly on the right track to finding it. However, it also seems that words and the symbols they construct are also essential tools for making sense of the material world itself, and not just its link to the heavens. Over-emphasising the spiritual capacity of literature would marginalise its potential ability to express the condition of man in the real world as it stands immediately before him. To what extent then are we actually bound up in the physical world through our usage of words? Can the authors Symons considers really live up to his standard as creators of “a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream” (3)?

Symons' assumption that certain poetic language can lead to a dreamlike melding with Absolute reality can only be properly analysed through its application to the city. Nearly all the writers he selects lived prominently (amongst artistic circles) in Paris, and several of them visited London. Symons, already an established poet by the time *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was published, framed his critical essays on personal experience. As we saw previously in chapter three, Symons skilfully translated Mallarmé's poetry into English, much to the Frenchman's pleasure. Verlaine had lived in London between 1872-73 with his lover and protégé Arthur Rimbaud and then returned once more from Paris in 1893 at Symons' invitation after his separation from Rimbaud. Though London to a certain extent lacked Paris' bustling café culture, it provided an unmatched quantity and variety of life. Unlike the uniform brightness of Haussmann's planned capital, London was "a picture continually changing, a continual sequence of pictures."<sup>219</sup> It was more changing, syncretic, and cosmopolitan than Paris and in its variety combined the imprint of European cities and customs with something more indigenously English.<sup>220</sup> Thus, the application of Symbolist goals and practices is likely to produce something quite different than the metaphysical ideal Symons finds in Paris-produced Symbolist writings. At the same time, however, two concepts illustrated in Symons' essays on Mallarmé and Verlaine, "the moment of crisis arrested at mid-flight" and "la nuance" provide early examples of how the city might be considered as a "fragment" or a "cinder." Indeed, the opening lines on Mallarmé describe the artist as "one of those who love literature too much to write it except by fragments" (62).

Symons singles Mallarmé out for his obscurity; his stylistic difficulty stemming not from a mere artistic propensity for dense and arcane language, but a more deeply seated

difference in consciousness. Mallarmé thinks differently, his mind “more elliptical” and interested in applying reading far beyond the day to day reading of a newspaper (63). Indeed, this poet who “vindicated the supreme right of the artist in the aristocracy of letters” is continuously described by Symons through kinetic metaphors and through images of a matrix. Mallarmé is a master who “in his perfect readiness to follow the slightest indication, to embroider upon any frame, with any material presented to him” and in whose salon “the questions that were discussed were never, at least in Mallarmé’s treatment [. . .] other than essential questions, considerations of art in the abstract, of literature before it coagulates into a book, of life as its amusing and various web spins the stuff of art” (64-65). This weaving of multiple subjects into a flowing conversation of ideas, a stream of intermingling concepts, characterises Mallarmé’s alternate state of consciousness. It sets him apart from other men and other artists alike. Instead of seeing the world as something fixed or solid, reality in Mallarmé’s mind is continually on the move and continually in flux; no form holds its shape longer than a matter of moments.

Mallarmé described his poetry, according to Symons, as “the language of a state of crisis,” and this “the evocation of a passing ecstasy, arrested in mid-flight,” bespeaks an interpenetration shared between the conscious mind and the outer world (66-67).

Newspapers are so banal because they present the urban world as something fixed, manageable and easily reportable. Articles can be read piecemeal or in sequence; neither approach makes much difference since no one story depends on the other. Verse, on the other hand, attempts to capture sensations at their moment of transition, when one feeling shifts from itself into another, and yet is neither of those two. Mallarmé’s moments of ecstasy are always passing away because they are never one distinct sensation. Reading

verse allows for the creation of an alternate experience distinct from the mass agglomeration of material in physical reality. Instead of affixing meaning into one spatial location set by whos, wheres, whens, and whys, Mallarmé's verses refract linguistic meaning across the field of consciousness, in which "every word is a jewel, scattering and recapturing sudden fire"(69).

The practice of poetry writing creates an alternate way of life by disassembling what previously appeared as a stable, solid environment into a network of fragments flowing between the outer, perceived world and the inner mind. Symons' essay suggests that if poets involve themselves with the true linguistic and semiotic nature of reality, they become able to manipulate perception, and further, that while this power over perception alienates literary artists from the majority of mankind, it offers a fuller sense of existence in return. This heightened consciousness plays a key element in Symons' conception of Paul Verlaine, a poet whose genius lies not in words, but in his capacity to live: "I think few men ever got so much out of their lives," writes Symons, "or lived so fully, so intensely, with such a genius for living. That, indeed, is why he was a great poet" (45). What Mallarmé does in verses, Verlaine does through his interaction with the world around him. As if he were in a fit of Mallarmé's ecstasy, Verlaine goes about in two worlds at once "with something of the air of the somnambulist [. . .] : the eyes often half closed, were like the eyes of a cat between sleeping and waking; eyes in which contemplation was 'itself an act'" (43). Again, the concept of the fragment catalyses Verlaine's double-vision:

And in the disquietude of his face, which seemed to take such close heed of things, precisely because it was sufficiently apart from them to be always a spectator, there was a realisable process of vision continually going on, in which all loose ends of the visible world were being caught up in a new mental fabric. (43)

The above passage juxtaposes the city's potential as a mental space with the tangible materiality of streets physically travelled by the urban walker. This is a new London exposed to Symons when,

In 1894, he [Verlaine] was my guest [. . .] I was amazed by the exactitude of his memory of the mere turnings of the streets, the shapes and colours of the buildings [. . .] He saw, he felt, he remembered everything, with an unconscious mental selection of the fine shades, the essential part of things, or precisely those aspects which most other people would pass by. (42)

Upon returning to England, Verlaine, despite some twenty years of absence, ably constructs the city from the loose ends of his memory. A mental map of the metropolis precipitates out of the remembered past and into the lived present.

Symons' account of Verlaine, however, confusingly mixes a metaphor of physical isolation and emotional withdrawal with a metaphor of vitality, exuberance and spirit. The "air of a somnambulist" seems quite different to that of someone with such a great "genius

for living.” It is as if Verlaine is not in complete control of his wits; instead of exerting full control over his body, his body walks automatically while some portion of his mind is asleep. Is this the ecstasy to which Symons refers in his essay on Mallarmé, or is there something for which Symons has not yet taken account? Verlaine writes in both Paris and London, but seemingly exists in these cities whenever he writes about them. When he encounters what Symons would describe as the “symbolist city” he no longer seems fully grounded in reality. The perceptual fabric Verlaine and Mallarmé each weave through poetry loses itself in vague references to “the intimate part of our spiritual life” and “the notation of the free breath of the spirit” (44, 70). In spiritualising poetic reality in his essays, Symons makes it seem as if everyday metropolitan life is something one should escape and that poetic language is a means for finding an exit from one world into another. But is this really possible? The gap between convention and innovation in nineteenth century representations of reality painted in Manet’s *Olympia* and cited later by Swinburne, Whistler, Wilde, and Michael Field seems as yet impassable. Locating the symbolist city seems too much like a one way journey, for finding spiritual enlightenment means giving up the city one knows and lives first-hand. But can one really give up this city so easily and enter a new conscious reality?

Symons’ work proves so important to understanding the development of urban modernity because he makes his readers keenly aware of the limits of the symbolist vision. Though it remains possible for an artist to re-conceptualise the city through the use of colour or language, the result need not condemn a materialist “newspaper” city and advocate an escape from the metropolis. One should rather embrace the fragmentary nature of urban culture in and of itself. His writing after *The Symbolist Movement in*

*Literature* opens an enquiry similar to Simmel's *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, which "must seek to solve the equation which structures like the metropolis set up between individuals and the supra-individual contents of life. Such an enquiry must answer the question of how the personality accommodates itself in the adjustment to external forces."<sup>221</sup> *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) addresses the fin de siècle problem underlying *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and introduced in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* by offering up brief prose pieces that characterise modernity as it appears to a single character, each a case study for how the individual might settle him or herself within the forces of modernity.<sup>222</sup>

"Christian Trevalga," the second tale in *Spiritual Adventures*, presents the dilemma of city life through a portrait of one who "had never known what it was to feel the earth solid underneath his feet" (91). Trevalga, a piano prodigy, never truly reconciles his identity as an artist with the possibility that he might identify with material reality without the assistance of music. The story opens as Trevalga awaits a doctor "who was to decide whether he might still keep his place in the world" and so in the mean time wonders, "Had the man all gone out of him, the power to live for himself, when his fingers were no longer on the keyboard?" (91). Symons here questions the notion of individuality in the city; Trevalga is desperate to know himself, to extract a sense of identity from his art, but Symons' text offers no clear answer. The story ends with the musician just as estranged as when his tale began.



The plot centres upon Trevalga, the obsessive musician who “lives at the piano,” and his transition from slow and anonymous rural life to the rapid attainment of fame offered in the city (95). Symons marks this transition by characterising a change in the way his pianist mentally processes sound. In his childhood home in Cornwall, Trevalga develops an ear typical to the countryside, the environment Simmel recognises as where “the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly” (*Metropolis* 13). When the night wind blows upon Trevalga’s house, it “flapped at the window with the sound of a sail flapping, [and] seemed to surround the house with realisable forms of sound” (95). The wind’s motion envelops Trevalga in a smooth and regular sonic field; it provides a complete sensory environment that sustains itself within Trevalga’s mind. Further, the budding musician identifies with his auditory experience to the extent that the world of aural sensation becomes more real to him than human society (98).

Though Trevalga understands music as “something more than an audible dramatisation of human life” and hears this in the wind, he remains unwilling and unable to establish a link between the world he hears and the social world with which he must interact (96). The narrator finds him “never able to attach any expressible meaning to the pieces he plays” and “tongue-tied if anyone asked him about them” (97). The piano player seems a sort of mystical wanderer or stranger, who in accessing a subjective realm he cannot objectively relate to social terms, separates himself from the rest of society:

All the time he had been, as he was that day at the college when he won the scholarship, playing behind a curtain. He knew that on the other side of the curtain was the world, with many things to do besides listening to him, though he could not arrest it when he liked, and make it listen; then it went on its way again, and the other things continued to occupy it. Well for him, what were those other things?

(102)

Though Trevalga is part of London's musical community, his position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he comes from the country and brings with him qualities that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to the city.<sup>223</sup> But Symons' musician is no ascetic either. Though Trevalga thinks of music in symbolist terms, with the language of his playing marking a border between the mundane and the esoteric, he is desperate to make acquaintances after moving to London to attend the conservatoire. He does not actively avoid society or romance, but makes no lasting with friendships or relationships.

Rana Vaughan, another music student, admires Trevalga's playing and attaches herself to him, but he sees her only from a remote distance: "For her, life was everything, and everything was part of life" (105). Her vivacious and indiscriminate appreciation for all art, for anything beautiful regardless of form, frightens the pianist:

She made no selections in life, beyond picking out all the beautiful and pleasant things, whatever they might be. Trevalga studied her in amazement; he felt withered, shrivelled up, in body and soul, beside her magnificent acceptance of the

world; she vitalised him, drew him away from himself, and he feared her. He feared women. (106)

Rana threatens Trevalga's sense of self because she draws him out of that musicality established during his years in the country. She interacts with everything while Trevalga interacts only with his durable impression of sound enveloping him like wind. Rana's artistic sense has the affect of the metropolis; she exchanges one form of art for another, their aesthetic qualities the common denominator of value. This, to use Simmel's terms, hollows out the core of Trevalga's musicianship and the individuality as piano player and the incomparability of his sensory experience (*Metropolis* 15).

Ironically, the artistic consciousness Trevalga so desperately protects denies him emotionally fulfilling friendships and romantic relationships. His defensive introversion makes interpersonal relationships impossible, leaving him helplessly isolated and starved in his art. Symons' tragic hero becomes much like Verlaine's somnambulist, "caged already, for another kind of slavery, the prisoner of his own fingers [. . .] they worked independently of himself, mechanically, doing their so many miles of promenade a day over the piano" (107-108). Though it has promoted a highly personal awareness of sound, Trevalga's playing has degraded from fantastic audition piece to rote, automatic playing. He dreams of feeling through his art, and yet his fingers feel nothing but the surface of the piano and the sensation of their own movements.

The barrier between artistic sensation and social life saps Trevalga's ability to create a stable consciousness independent of the city. He finds it increasingly difficult to live within London without becoming part of it. From this point forward, the story gauges the artist's ability to interact directly with the metropolis. I would like to put Verlaine and Mallarmé's respective theories in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* to work alongside Simmel's at the moment Trevalga hears "a noise in the street [. . .] which came to him for the most part with the suggestion of a cadence, which his ear completed as if it had been the first note of a well known tune or silence, in some region outside of reality" (110). Here the story recounts Trevalga's tenuous ability to maintain control of his aural senses within his inner mind. At first, he seems quite able to replicate the sensory field of his youth; the sounds of the city envelope him just as stably as the winds outside his bedroom in Cornwall did. Trevalga's powers of aural perception combine with his musical sensibility to open a gateway between two different realities, and the city provides a sensory medium through which the musician's consciousness achieves a heightened awareness. But this heightened awareness does not offer easy entrance to an alternate realm in which musical talent and emotional reticence will be reconciled. Under the influence of his experience, Trevalga can no longer bring sensations from the outer world into focus. He loses his ability to bring a hectic picture of physical activity into focus:

But he could not concentrate his mind, he seemed somehow to be slipping away from himself, dissolving into an uneasy vacancy [. . .] The confusing lights, the crush and hurry of figures wrapped in dark clothes, the noise of the horses' hoofs striking the stones, the shouts of omnibus conductors and newsboys, all the surge and struggle of horrible exterior forces, seeming to be tightened up into an

inextricable disorder, but pushing out with a hundred arms this way and that, making some sort of headway against the opposition of things, brought over by a complete bewilderment. (113-14)

Instead of an ordered harmony built around steady cadence, metropolitan life dissolves into a barrage of visual and auditory assaults. Trevalga is quite literally shaken up; jostled by the crowd he stumbles into the street, collapses, and narrowly avoids being trampled by a horse.

Trevalga ends his migration from the Cornish countryside to the streets of London dying in an asylum with a psychiatrist desperately trying to decide whether or not the musician “might still keep his place in the world” (117). Keeping one’s place in the metropolis forms the story’s central dilemma, and raises a distinction between how one might survive spatially in the city and how one might survive psychically in the city. When Trevalga hears street noise, his mind effortlessly builds a cadence from the great mixture of sound around him. However, the heightened consciousness that results shatters his ability to observe his presence in a geographically measurable world. The city falls apart in the musician’s mind, dissolving to a whirling cyclone of confused sensation. It becomes uncountable and thereby visibly incoherent. It appears that once Trevalga cannot set the city street to the ordered rhythm and pitch of a musical score, his ability to coherently perceive reality fails. According to Simmel, “the relationships and affairs of the typical metropolitan usually are so varied and complex that without the strictest punctuality in promises and services the whole structure would break down into an inextricable chaos”

(*Metropolis* 14). Trevalga's consciousness of the city fails when he can no longer count his impressions of the city into a steady tempo.

*Spiritual Adventures* delves into urban modernity through an examination of human consciousness to raise questions about how the symbolist experience operates in the city. Trevalga leaves rural life for the metropolis as a way to expand his musical ability, but finds himself strained by the cacophony of his new milieu. The unity of perception fostered in Cornwall falls prey to an urban environment so replete with impressions that it cannot be timed; the musician cannot locate the city around any set rhythm. Temporality in this sense oscillates between an opposition between space, which indicates a sense of movement, and becoming and place, which implies a static sense of location and being.<sup>224</sup> Symons conceptualises the acts of reading, playing, and listening to music as something tied inherently to motion; reading and playing notes across a musical score translates directly into the motion of crowds, omnibuses, and motor cars. The sense of poetic identity and becoming he articulates in relation to French poetry later becomes a direct application of movement within the space of the city. Together, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and *Spiritual Adventures* realise the city as an environment in which modernity moves in constant flux through an economy of exchange and equivalence. Rana Vaughann, though less talented musically, finds a fulfilling life in London because she embraces the interchangeability of life in the city. For her, the city creates an effect of rationalising vicissitudes between loss and gain which Trevalga finds so troubling.<sup>225</sup> The figure of the omnibus is especially important here in representing a compression of time and space in the capitalist city, heightening the desire for a new

cognitive map of modernity.<sup>226</sup> Symons alerts readers to this need by charting a pianist's artistic migration to London and his subsequent identity crisis.

Playing the piano transports Trevalga to an alternate reality; by aurally accumulating musical notes in his mind the young musician envelopes himself in a stable sensory world, and this shields him from an otherwise chaotic London. However, this makes Trevalga hopelessly introverted and instigates his ever-increasing estrangement from the metropolis. What results is a sensorial overloading and mental breakdown in a city too rapidly changing and enlarging to comprehend in traditional terms.<sup>227</sup> Though street sounds have a basic analogue in the musician's scale, the cadences Trevalga reflexively uses to make sense of the city are quickly overwhelmed. Symons here references a growing scrutiny into the city as a cause of psychological alienation, and notes the inadequacy of solipsism in overcoming this alienation. Further, the story's conclusion emphasises the significance of sight as a metaphor that articulates Trevalga's breakdown. Senses that begin with sound end in a visual conceptualisation of modernity around "confusing lights" and the appearance of an omnibus in his path. Further, what estranges Trevalga from the city is not spatial proximity or spatial distance, but the specific psychological content of the city.<sup>228</sup>

In using "Christian Trevalga" as a case study for the symbolist experience in relation to urban environment in the first years of the twentieth century, I hope to have shown the limits of a sustained introversion or solipsism in reconciling individuality with the multiplicity inherent within the metropolis. Trevalga's dilemma articulates the moment

of crisis that figures so heavily in Symons' view of Mallarmé in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, while also raising some questions regarding Simmel's account of urban psychology in the essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. Here Simmel examines how the chaos of the urban environment causes the mind to impose a psychic defence mechanism, a blasé attitude that maintains the individual's personal subjectivity within the city. Following the essay's argument, the urban dweller's superficial levels of consciousness develop a tolerance for the city's chaotic environment, just as the drug addict requires increasingly large doses over time. The concentration of human activity and objects stimulates the nervous system to higher and higher levels, which then quickly normalise to finally transform sensory excitation to sensory deadening. The mental tolerance that results protects the urban dweller's levels of conscious reasoning from the urban environment. According to Simmel, "In this phenomenon the nerves find the refusal to react to their stimulation the last possibility of accommodating the contents and forms of metropolitan life. The self-preservation of certain personalities is brought at the price of devaluating the whole objective world" (15). And yet the exact opposite happens to Trevalga, whose attempt to devalue the objective world by spurning human contact inevitably draws him out onto the streets. The environment that ought to normalise Trevalga's mind is where his reasoning consciousness proves most vulnerable.

In considering the incongruity between urban and mental life raised by Symons in *Spiritual Adventures*, I now turn to the philosophical background within which Symons situates his writing, with continued interest in Georg Simmel's theories of urban social dynamics. Christian Trevalga's desperate end in an insane asylum references the special interest taken by academics in urban space as the metropolis became the privileged



territory of a host of ailments attributed directly to its spatial conditions, diseases like hysteria, neurasthenia, agoraphobia, claustrophobia, and vertigo. The discovery of these “street fears” reflects a wider process of mapping the city according to its changing social characteristics.<sup>229</sup> This is not a new phenomenon, and one in which poetry has deep seated interests. Baudelaire marked the discrepancy between city life and the physical reconstruction of Paris in the poetic malaise of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Le Spleen de Paris*, which Swinburne brought to England by translating Parisian modernity through the geographic spaces and physical violence of Sapphic poetry. Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray* detailed an aetiology of eternal youth through his pathological urban study of portrait that bears the ills of its sitter. Likewise, Simmel’s depiction of the metropolis as a dualistic system in which the psychological state of the individual artist creates and is impinged upon by social institutions plays a crucial role in the developing literary modernism of T.E. Hulme and further, the paradox of a mind both generated and infected by the city leads to a problematic conceptualisation of time as both a static presence and a continual, linearly flowing entity. Thus, I consider in the following section how Simmel’s urban psychopathology corresponds to Symons’ tale Christian Trevalga and so doing gesture towards how Henri Bergson reconciles Simmelian duality of static and flowing time. This will provide some preliminary indications of how urban psychology and philosophy enables poets like Hulme to develop new methods for experiencing transcendence in the city.

## **II. Theorising the City, Theorising the Mind**

Arguably the first sociologist of modernity, Simmel announced in 1890 an “increased externalisation of life that has come about, with regard to the preponderance that the technical side of life has obtained over its inner side, over its personal values.”<sup>230</sup> In this

line of thought, material life had come to dominate subjectivity in an increasingly objective and object-oriented world.<sup>231</sup> The materialism of life, the externalisation of interests, and technical perfection were extolled “as though the electric light raised man a stage nearer perfection, despite the fact that the objects more clearly seen by it are just as trivial, ugly, or unimportant as when looked at it by the aid of petroleum” (*Tendencies* 95). Transcendental life, however, would provide little as an aid of escape from this technologically externalised world. Simmel recognised the proliferation of objects and “fragments” produced by commodity culture and market capitalism. Put simply and directly, “The money economy dominates the metropolis” (*Metropolis* 14). He also recognised the forms of money economy were in perpetual flux, and considered this fluctuation to be lodged a priori in those individuals who felt the constraints of materialist culture most deeply. Hence, Simmel saw humans as always constrained by external boundaries that they continually try to move beyond, and saw human experience as simultaneously and paradoxically both bounded and boundless.<sup>232</sup>

Such a concept has lasting implications on the artist’s role in the city. Though aesthetics could formulate ways of accessing a way to escape the brutal objectivity of materialist culture, it would be forever constrained by them. Urban aestheticism could not transcend itself: “Unless I am deceived,” Simmel writes, “this sudden increase in the fondness of art will not long endure. The transcendental impulse [. . .] has sought an outlet for itself in the aesthetic; but it will learn that this field also is too limited” (*Tendencies* 176-77). Art does not offer a lasting substitute for the real world. Instead, the real world might become a means for incorporating the aesthetic into the inner life of the mind.

The opening passage of *The Metropolis and Mental Life* declares Simmel's aim to examine how "the products of specifically modern life are questioned as to their inner nature, as it were, the body of culture as to its soul" (*Metropolis* 12). As its title and opening both imply, Simmel's essay seeks a correlative between the metropolis, as the body of culture, to consciousness as the body of individual thought. Modernity is a particular mode of lived experience within modern society that is incorporated into our mental life.<sup>233</sup> Further, modernity can be traced through those materials or "fragments" that exemplify the exchange occurring between individuals in society and the exchange between an individual and society at large. Modernity in this sense is an economy and aptly, Simmel articulates his concept of exchange in *The Philosophy of Money*.<sup>234</sup> Money in this essay is both object and metaphor. In the first sense, money "is simply a means, a material or an example for the presentation of relations"; a coin or bill provides a physical referent for the inherent transfer of value between two or more parties (55). In the second, money is merely physical metaphor for the traceable energies present in modern life and through which modernity manifests. The energies of monetary exchange (or any exchange, for that matter) shape a totality of existence within which occur individual activities. According to Simmel, "Our practical existence, though inadequate and fragmentary, gains a certain significance and coherence, as it were, by partaking in the realisation of a totality" (451). As an empirical signifier of value, money cannot possibly realise this totality; but as energy, money provides a mode for apprehending that totality; and though Simmel never states it explicitly, I would be so bold to state that the city itself is that totality.

Money economy represents a form of consciousness imbedded within the metropolis. In *Spiritual Adventures*, the economy of visual, auditory, and tactile stimulation Trevalga feels when hearing London street noise erects a boundary between what the musician perceives as immediate reality in the street and “some region outside reality”: “So long as I can distinguish,” he says to himself, “between the one and the other, I am safe; the danger will be when they become indistinguishable” (110). And thus the danger comes; when Trevalga tries to set the city to music, he is overwhelmed by a crippling agoraphobia. The dissolution of the boundary between internal and external experience proves so incapacitating because the artist’s mind always sets sound to rhythm; it seeks out a cadence and tries to complete it metrically. He tries to time the city according to the tactile patterns he feels on piano keys and as a result, loses consciousness.

The mental breakdown Symons describes raises the key issue of time in relation to space and the energy of the city. The artist cannot transcribe the city according to rhythm if indeed all the aural, visual, and tactile forms of that rhythm interpenetrate; instead of elevating his state of mind, the artist’s mind rejects its consciousness’s formulation of reality and shuts down. Trevalga’s collapse indicates a collapse of the urban dweller’s ability to process sensory data into a neat synaesthetic order. I do not mean to say that the city here is not synaesthetic, for indeed it is. Rather, Trevalga breaks down because he tries to force that synaesthesia into a tight harmonic structure. The task was quite different for Baudelaire, who focuses on distinct and individual scenes in his poetics. Symons, however, takes on all the city at once, and Trevalga cannot handle it. Symons’ chaotic and uncontrollable synaesthesia gives way to a neurasthetia typical of the times: “a sensation of cerebral emptiness accompanied by a weakness of the lower limbs [. . .] A veil spreads

before the eyes, everything is grey and leaden; the visual field is full of black spots, flying patches, close or distant objects are confused on the same plane.”<sup>235</sup> In this sense the city is both a physical site which the artist cannot physiologically order through his senses and a pathological state in which consciousness, as constituted by physical sense perception, disintegrates.<sup>236</sup> For Simmel, the physical space of the city was the instrument of a systematised and enforced alienation. *The Philosophy of Money* identifies a spatial pathology of the urban environment, the aetiology of which manifests through the dimensions of geographical space, especially when there seems to be no boundary to the sufferer’s sensory field.

The uncontrolled stimuli of the metropolis wear down the city dweller, who finds it impossible to place any distance between physical environment and himself. Simmel proposes that for the city dweller, the conscious mind condenses linear time: “While the past, present, and future can be analytically separated, life exists in the present only insofar as it is also a past and a future.” Simmel presents a dualistic model of temporal life; on one hand he outlines the “boundless continuity [that is a] continuous stream proceeding through sequences of generations. Life consists of objective historical and cultural forms which constrain the individual.” But on the other hand, individual life and experience results arrive through a “boundary determined ego” which condenses as a complete individual separate from the objective cultural environment.<sup>237</sup> Ideally, individuals are simultaneously aware of their submersion in societal forms and their separateness from them. They are conscious of the ongoing flux that characterises social life and use its energy to establish individual identity. In temporal reality, “we do not live partly in continuity, partly in individuality, the two asserting themselves against the other” (*Individuality and Social*

*Forms* 368). Instead, individuality arrives through the boundaries erected by the energies of temporal life. Ego-based consciousness arrives through an awareness of the temporal continuity that characterises inter-generational life, and the subsequent distillation of individuality from that continuity into an awareness of the present moment.

Agoraphobia indicates the urban dweller's inability to crystallise an ego from the swirling continuity of temporal life. The agoraphobic is unable to balance his or her personality against the crowds of people and objects filling the external environment; pathologically speaking, the city intrudes upon the agoraphobic's inner life. For Simmel, the urbanite must cope with both linear time and the condensed present of the ego by erecting a defensible boundary between his subjective awareness of the city and the city itself. Through this barrier, the city dweller prevents the agoraphobic condition that results when the mind is unable to parse sensory data of the city brought to it through vision, hearing, touch, and taste. The metropolitan type does this by welcoming the intrusive effects of the city; by opening his mind to the cacophony of stimuli, the urbanite grows accustomed to the excitatory urban environment and eventually, becomes bored of it. If city life brings about an unbridled onslaught of spatial sensation, then the city dweller should embrace it. Such over-stimulation will dull his sensitivity to it, and thereby allow him to exert a subjective personality in light of it. The resulting blasé attitude allows the urbanite a personal freedom exclusive to the metropolis and becomes the means through which the artist negotiates the extremes of urban apathy and agoraphobia (*The Metropolis and Mental Life* 16). The artist who uses the energies of the city to actively create a border for his or her own ego renders that ego distinct from the space of the city while also working from the energies of exchange in order to work within them. The more the artist

uses the flux of city life to bind subjectivity together, the greater his or her capacity for freedom; paradoxically, the lack of physical distance from bodies in the city enables the agency of the artist (17).

In the metropolis, individuality transcends material culture when the artist becomes part and parcel of the exchange economy. By seeking out increased contact from the city instead of avoiding it, one is able to integrate a personal lifestyle into the urban environment. The metropolis becomes the locale of freedom when the inner life of the ego takes on the inner life of the city. At this point, the quantitative aspect of life is transformed directly into qualitative traits of character (17). The nature of modernity in the economic city lies not in the number of fragments produced through exchange, but in their intensity. Indeed, the number of material objects passing through the metropolitan economy is vast; they cannot all be traced. “Christian Trevalga” is a case in point. When the pianist tries to count the city sounds into a rhythm, he quickly loses control over his mental picture of the city. True freedom for Simmel arrives not when an individual attempts to identify directly with his or her impressions, as Trevalga does, but rather when the individual maps his or her path through the city psychically instead of spatially. “The essential point,” Simmel stresses,

is that the particularity and incomparability, which ultimately every human being possesses, be somehow expressed in the working out of a way of life. That we follow the laws of our own nature – and this after all is freedom – becomes obvious

and convincing to ourselves and to others only if the expressions of this nature differ from the expressions of others. (17)

The metropolis offers the artist an opportunity to merge the energies of his or her consciousness with the energies of the exchange economy. Freedom arises once the energies of self expression and identity merge with the external impressions swirling through the city.

Simmel's commentary provides the background against which strangers to London life like Symons' Trevalga try to cope with their new surroundings and establish their personal aesthetic visions. Indeed, Symons' fictional introduces a paradigm for assessing how artists, as strangers, observe the city as a stream of ever-flowing materialist fragments, and then use this phenomenon to articulate their aesthetic discourses. The difference between quantity and quality is especially important in this line of thought. Simmel's thoughts on the quantity of exchange in the city and the quality of consciousness in the city dweller follow a philosophical trajectory parallel to the ideas of the French thinker Henri Bergson. Bergson's writings broke from the philosophical mainstream by advocating a sensory experience defined by the qualitative nature of perception and the artist's capacity to experience qualitative perception through a metaphysical method he calls intuition. Intuition, and the "real duration," the reality of psychological time it accesses, disrupt the notion that material reality exists through the counting of objects in a spatial environment. Instead, intuition advocates a conscious reality in which sense perceptions fuse and con-fuse within the temporal unity of the mind. The urban poet in this



case uses intuition to merge with the fragments of the city. Instead of factoring themselves into Simmel's model of exchange, T.E. Hulme and Bergson investigate a poetic modernity that sees the city as a state of mind.<sup>238</sup>

### **III. The Intense, Cindery, City: Bergson and Hulme on Metropolitan Consciousness**

Bergson's work on perception in *Time and Free Will* (1889) makes a significant departure from materialist conceptions of space. Bergson, like Simmel, insists that human beings must not be considered objects within the field of temporal reality: "If we try to measure and count our feelings, to explain and predict our motives and actions, we will be transformed into automatons – without freedom, without beauty, without passion, and without dreams. We will become phantoms of ourselves."<sup>239</sup> Thus, humans in the city are distinct from the fragments swirling around them and as such inhabit a wholly different spatial field: the field of consciousness. The city in this sense is not a geographic entity filled with objects trafficking through it; the city is a consciousness, a state of mind in which the individual exists and through which the artist establishes his aesthetic practice.

Poetically speaking, the distinction between human consciousness and the automaton proves so important because it signals the impetus behind T.E. Hulme's notion of an urban encounter that avoids linguistic mediation and as a result, resists symbolisation. Instead of picking out focusing on singular images within the city, Hulme, inspired by the open pastures of central Canada, pondered the qualitative changes occurring between multiple images. The result was "Cinders," Hulme's unpublished notebook which first describes reality as something created through inter-personal

communication and then goes on to identify the excessive use of language as fundamentally detrimental to our understanding of reality:

The ultimate reality is a circle of persons, i.e. animals who communicate. There is a gossamer web, woven between the real things, and by this means the animals communicate. For purposes of communication they invent a symbolic language. Afterwards this language, used to excess, becomes a disease, and we get the curious phenomena of men explaining themselves by means of the gossamer web that connects them. Language becomes a disease in the hands of the counter-word mongers. (9)

Language sets a precarious boundary between the uses of communication and what communication is in and of itself. Symbolic language distorts reality because it distorts the difference between communication as a mode and communication as a thing. The reification of “that gossamer web” confuses the distinction between real things and the words invented to communicate their meaning. Reality lies not in the artificial accumulation of words, and thereby threads of meaning, but in the webs of meaning exerted between things themselves. Like Bergson, Hulme rejects objectified reality in favour of a subjective consciousness. Both advocate a line of thought which explores the qualitative nature of phenomena within individual subjectivity. The world is a plurality which manifests in Hulme’s words as “cinders” and for Bergson operates through the mind’s perception of “intensities.”

Recent critical work has emphasised that Hulme's arrival in London from Staffordshire occurred somewhat after modernism had begun its hold on literary culture, and fashioned his literary and cultural criticism in vexingly contradictory ways.<sup>240</sup> However, while Hulme's great influence upon literary modernism in London has been discussed at length regarding his membership in numerous intellectual clubs and coteries: the ABC club in Chancery Lane, the Café Royal in Piccadilly, the Twenty One Group and the Poets' Club, his associations with Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, F.S. Flint, and Ford Madox Ford, and his regular contributions in leading periodicals like the *New Age*, little has been said about the direct influence city life had in shaping Hulme's early thought, his philosophical interests, and his creative output. Though direct references to Bergson are indeed absent in Hulme's early notebooks, this should not lead us to believe that their similarities in thought did not encourage their friendship a few years later. Paul Edwards has said that because Hulme uses images of mud and cinders as metaphors for reality, "Bergsonism thus begins to appear to be a huge detour in the development of Hulme's 'search for reality.'"<sup>241</sup> However, Bergson believes "the poetic experience comes about through a display of difference; the images within change yield differences in kind. In its successive stages, this difference engages with other psychic energies, qualitatively modifying or colouring the ensemble of our psyche in various ways." This encourages a closer look at way in which Hulme uses London locales to articulate his "cinder" theory and how that articulation generate an artistic consciousness very similar to Bergson's.<sup>242</sup>

The difference between qualitative and quantitative elements Bergson emphasises entails a distinction between differences in degree and differences in kind. *Time and Free Will* advocates a discourse in which the qualitative conveys meaning through the perceived

intensity of an object or effect. However, qualitative perception, while being our primary method of sensation, resists linguistic expression because intensity, as a qualitative factor, cannot be expressed through the quantitative nature of words. Words convey meaning by counting out and calculating meaning through various signs and signifiers. Interestingly, Bergson conveys this concept through the dance, the same figure Symons uses in “Nora on the Pavement” to discuss the metropolis’ ability to house an alternate reality within itself. Bergson asks us to “see” the “rapid flow” of ideas and sensations using a kinetic metaphor:

Let us consider [. . .] the feeling of graciousness/gracefulness. At first it is simply a matter of the perception of a certain ease, or facility, of movement. And since these are movements which seem to flow out of each other we end up finding a superior grace in movements that are anticipated in present attitudes which seem to already indicate the following ones, as if they were somehow performed. If sudden movements lack grace it is because each one is sufficient unto itself and does not announce those to come. If curved lines are more graceful than broken ones, it is because the curved line, which is always changing direction, turns in such a way that each new direction is already indicated in the preceding one. The perception of each motion is thus based on the pleasure we take in arresting the forward march of time and hold the future in the present. (11-13)

To properly perceive grace, one must be able to see the interrelationship between the separate visual impressions that work together to generate a sense of motion. The dance figures the change or movement, characterised by multiplicity and flow, which is specific

to inner, qualitative experience in general, and figures qualitative change, difference in kind as movement through time. The movement of the dancer lets us see the reality of flowing time.<sup>243</sup> Grace arrives through the interpenetration of visual impressions in the mind; each impression signals the arrival of the next. Thus, one is able to anticipate the unfolding image before it actually happens. The motion is completed in the mind before it is completed by the dancing body. The linear time of the latter movement collapses into a temporal unity unique to human consciousness. Expressing this effect, however, forces the qualitative intensity of the motion into a quantitative state: “It is this qualitative progress that we interpret as a quantitative change in degree of intensity. This is because [. . .] language is poorly equipped to render the subtleties of psychological analysis” (11-13). Bergson, however, does not mean to dismiss language as incapable of generating qualitative perception. Indeed, as Symons writes of Mallarmé, it is the suggestion that matters, not the statement.

Subjective personality formed through qualitative perception structures the philosophical paradigm in *Time and Free Will*, just as in “Cinders,” where, “only in the fact of consciousness is there unity in the world. Cf. Oxford Street at 2. a.m. All the mud, endless, except where bound together by the spectator” (10). For Hulme, London modifies an existing paradigm for inner sensory experience. As seen in chapter three, Symons is only able to write “Nora in the Pavement” because the city illuminates her motion. The poet needs the streetlight to bring Nora’s motion to his attention. Her illumination predicates her motion, which in turn predicates the subjective grace through which Symons composes the poem. In “Cinders” the city illuminates man’s subjective consciousness by highlighting the grace lost through objective description: London “looks pretty at night

because for the general cindery chaos there is substituted a simple ordered arrangement of a finite number of lights” (10). The counterpoint between Nora’s motion in Symons’ poem and the static light of London in Hulme’s essay strongly resonate with how Bergson understands artistic production:

I assure you, that the goal of art is to put to rest the active, or rather resistant, forces of our personality, and to lead us to a state of perfect docility in which we actualise the idea which has been suggested to us, or sympathise with the feeling expressed [. . .] Thus, in music for example, the rhythm and the beat suspend the normal flow of our sensations and ideas by making our attention oscillate between fixed points. [. . .] Where does the charm of poetry come from? A poet is someone in whom feelings develop into images, and images into words [. . .] Seeing these images pass back and forth before our eyes we in turn experience the feeling that was their emotional equivalent. (*Time and Free Will* 13-15)

“Seeing these images pass back and forth between our own eyes” implies a multiplicity of images all passing between one another between the eyes of the observer, and thus a poetics organised around a singular symbolic element banishes qualitative perception. “In an organised city,” Hulme writes, “it is not easy to see the cinder element of earth – all is banished” (“Cinders” 12). Instead, we must allow ourselves to see a disorganised, dirty city where “the eyes, the beauty of the world, have been organised out of the faeces. Man returns to dust. So does the face of the world to primeval cinders” (12). The grace of the metropolis under modernism must be discerned through an active effort to see things

through an effect of diminishment or disintegration. Simplifying these images say, into swatches of colour, allows us to place them along a spectrum of intensity which as a unit, implies motion or emotional excitement much in the same way the collective movements of a dance implies a sense of grace. Again, light clarifies the interrelationship between Bergson's theory and a visual poetic practice:

Consider closely a sheet of paper illuminated by four candles, and then extinguish three out of the four candles one at a time [. . .] You say the surface remains white and that the brightness diminishes. You know, of course, that one candle has been extinguished; or, if you didn't know it, you have often noted an analogous change in the aspect of a white surface when the lighting was reduced [. . .] If you call the first surface white, in all its brightness, you will have to give another name to what you see, since it is something else I few speak in this way, we might call it another nuance of white. (*Time and Free Will* 53-54)

This passage invites a new way of thinking. Instead of seeing variations in brightness as increases or decreases in the quantity of a single term, white, Bergson considers the range of nuances that exist between the two poles of black and white.<sup>244</sup> It is just this sense of qualitative nuance, this sense of a multiplicity in consciousness that Bergson attributes to inner experience of consciousness in general. Quantitative consciousness, on the other hand, exists in external reality. Instead of wanting us to count the number of colours present on the sheet of paper as each candle is extinguished, Bergson wants us to account for what we see in all at once in our minds. Counting colours determines the space of an

external element, not the present in which our subjective mind forms those colours into a perceptual reality.

And so back to poetry. The visual nuance Bergson theorises articulates the impressionist experience Symons accounts for in “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” details in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, and practices in “Nora on the Pavement” and is intricately related to the aesthetic experience of the urban poet. However, the nature of the nuance has changed. No longer a means in and of itself to consciousness of a higher external reality beyond or outside the city, the nuance animates the fluctuation of a fragmented city that manifests in the inner mind. Thus, I would like to propose a shift in the development of poetic practice instigated by Hulme in the early twentieth century away from an aesthetic in which the city is visualised as space to one in which the city comes to occupy a time. In this mode of thought, the spaces of the city come to represent spaces of consciousness, not just places names and geographic areas. At the same time, however, the urban environment remains the catalytic force in revealing the presence of a fragmented, impressionist, “cindery” reality. Grand statements and heady thinking are insufficient without the city to actuate them. Philosophical syntheses and ethical systems are only possible in armchair moments: “They are seen to be meaningless as soon as we get into a bus with a dirty baby and a crowd” (“Cinders” 13).

The symbolist poetics Symons writes about and practices provides an analytical method through which the poet and his or her reader come to know the city. Though this symbolist practice is most often described through metaphysical metaphors and references



to the spiritual and esoteric, these analogies function only as representations for a new city lurking behind our immediate perception of urban life. Accordingly, the visual practice Oscar Wilde, Michael Field, and Arthur Symons use depends upon an ekphrastic system that spatialises urban reality through painted works of art. Dorian Gray's urban experience as an eternal youth depends upon his portraits ability to spatially represent the depravity of his actions. Michael Field travels from gallery with the specific intent of developing a poetics that will allow them to enter the painted canvas. Symons uses his experience before the music-hall stage as a basis for observing a solitary dancer perform in the street. By nature, ekphrasis too often urges readers to think about the city in relation to a collection of images bound by space. Though it brings certain spaces of the city immediately to view, this immediacy cannot make up for the fact that such urban experiences are viewed second hand by their reading audience. Ekphrasis objectifies urban experience by treating its subjects as countable objects in space.

The metropolis manifests not as a network of separate spaces, but as a mass grouping of interpenetrating temporal impressions. These impressions function synergistically; they cannot be separated from one another, for doing so shifts immediate perception of the urban environment into a secondary representation defined by spatiality and location as viewed by, "the eagle's eye of the metaphysician," as Hulme calls it (19). But Hulme's writings are only part of a larger set of urban poetics at work after the fin de siècle. Only through an awareness of an integral urban time, such as that suggested by Simmel, Hulme, and Bergson can we loosen the constraints of progress and empiricism which so bind artists working in the metropolis in mid-to late nineteenth century. The fifth and final chapter which follows will examine the ways in which Ezra Pound, Hulme's

protégé in London, and T.S. Eliot, Pound's collaborator and fellow American, navigate the time of city through an imagistic poetics that allows for the direct immersion of the artist into the temporal depth of the city. The following analyses will look at poetic images of London as Hulme does, as "streams, dirt, mud, and power," images which provide the proving ground for three travelling, Anglo-American poets' education in cinders.

## Chapter Five: T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot: North American Subjectivities and the City

### I. T.E. Hulme, Henri Bergson, and the Poetic Consciousness in the City

The passage of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth ushered in a new set of parameters for the organisation of urban space. As we saw with Baudelaire in chapter one, the distinctive sign of nineteenth century urbanism was the boulevard, that clean, wide and straight thoroughfare which ruptured the dividing line between the private life of the domestic interior and the public city street. Indeed, in the post-Haussmann street the fundamental social and psychic contradictions of modern life converged and threatened to erupt.<sup>245</sup> The energies of materialist culture illustrated in poems like Baudelaire's "The Eyes of the Poor" and identified specifically by Georg Simmel in *The Philosophy of Money* and *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, enable a metropolitan dynamism between the inner spaces of subjectivity and the outer spaces of city geography that shapes London life. The poetic imagination during the early years of the twentieth century was especially shaped by a continued trend amongst artists who saw the street as generating artistic life and delivering artistic culture. In 1909, Ford Madox Ford spoke of modernist poetry as something started by those who would "get it into their heads to come out of their book-closets and take, as it were, a walk down Fleet St., or a ride on the top of a bus from Shepard's Bush to Poplar."<sup>246</sup> Similarly, Raymond Williams argues the specific location of artists and intellectuals within the metropolis has more to tell than any other theme associated with modernity. What is more, Williams specifically points to the city's newcomers: "it cannot too often be emphasised how many of the major innovators were, in

this precise sense, immigrants.”<sup>247</sup> The significance trans-national migration plays in the aesthetic practices bound up in modernism begins my interest here in how T.E. Hulme uses the urban environment as the proving ground for his early writings his “Cinders” among them. Hulme’s geographic distance from London both within English borders and beyond them mediates his vision of the city, and how that vision figures semantically in his poems.

Hulme entered St. John’s College, Cambridge as a biology and physics student in 1902. Two years later he struck out for Canada on a steamer, apparently as a ship’s steward.<sup>248</sup> The voyage was as much a mental departure as it was a physical one for Hulme, “one which helps one discover the undiscovered portions of one’s mind” (*Cinders* 22). Indeed, a striking counterpoint between Hulme’s failed university career in hard sciences at Cambridge and his later immersion in philosophy and poetry parallels Simmel’s counterpoint in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* between the fragmentation of the city and the consolidation of individuality and subjective consciousness in the mind. Hulme’s departure from ordered education at Cambridge signals a subsequent disavowal of an empirically determined world “of a few ideal counters” (11). “The flats of Canada,” contrastingly, “are incomprehensible on any single theory” (10). Following Williams, Hulme’s notion of London as “cindery chaos” arrives part and parcel of his experience in a foreign country. Lines written responding to Fields and prairies in Alberta are anchored by references to London like “Oxford Street, 2 a.m.”

The geographical distance between Canada and London is inversely proportional to the psychic distance between Hulme and the city. The further Hulme is from the metropolis, the closer he is to it mentally. But at the same time, Hulme’s Canadian

writings advocate “landscape thinking,” a notion in which spaces are put into the terms of mental states. Thus, discerning whether Hulme means one should project mental states outwardly into the city, or whether one should think space in terms of subjectivity, proves difficult. This is especially so given the way “Cinders” conflates physicality with the mind’s sensory capacities:

In Tube lift hearing the phrase ‘fed up’, and realising that all our analogies spiritual and intellectual are derived from purely physical acts.

All poetry is an affair of the body—that is, to be real it must affect the body. (21)

These aphorisms approach the interpenetration of the subjective mind with external reality from two opposing angles. In the first, the presence of sound as something external to the body encapsulates a realisation made in the mind. The second, however, conflates mental and physical space: poetry, a creative act, becomes something with a direct physiological effect. Hulme’s wording makes one think poetry has a visible, external reaction with the body. For Hulme then, are mental processes inseparable from physical action? And if so, how would poetry, as a physical action, function inside the larger space of the city?

Some resolution arrives in “Notes on Language and Style” (1907). The essay describes how the literary arts offer a sense of permanence through their ability to shift communicative meaning away from semiotic construction and towards the formation of a mental image. Writing is essentially visual; in the poetic line “there is a constant

movement above and below the line of meaning (representation)” (24). Poetic form here takes on a sense of spatial imagery. Words laid out in verse evoke emotion through their capacity to vibrate between one another and build a “real solid vision or sound” (24). Poetry, ironically, depends on the very “counters” disavowed previously in “Cinders,” in that the free, associative movement of words in the mind evokes a poem’s overall meaning. This sort of poetics allows for a creative reasoning through the “arranging counters on the flat, where they can be moved about, without the mind having to think in any involved way,” and thus circumvents the analytical mind by producing images which “pass to conclusion before thinking” (25). For Hulme, the written page creates an intermediary reality between the external environment and the inner space of consciousness. Paper grants poetry a physical body which supersedes a reductive world in which words replace immediate physical vision with a secondary, semiotic reality. Thus, the spatial arrangement of words written on a sheet creates a poetic reality by taking words, as counters, and making them into images seen; “it is a cindery thing done, not a pure thought made manifest in some counter-like way” (25). For Hulme, holding on to the idea in poetry “through the absolutely transforming influence of putting it into definiteness” gives a vision concrete form, an arrangement on the page (26).

The city provides the observer with an ocular counterpart for the written page of the poet. It opens the poet’s consciousness to the visual capacity of thought by stimulating “the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two different things”:

Think of sitting at that window in Chelsea and seeing the chimneys and the lights  
in the dusk.

And then imagine that by contemplation this will transfer itself bodily onto paper.

This is the direct opposite of literature, which is never an absorption and meditation.

But a deliberate choosing and working-up of analogies. The continued close, compressed effort. (29, 30)

Viewing the city and viewing poetry bring the mind to contemplative states in which the mind's faculties of perception are absorbed in the visual environment. In the first instance, viewing the meditative quality of the city arises through the varied intensities of the urban environment, as experienced by the observer, "seeing the chimneys and the lights at dusk," for example. In the second, the poem's arrangement on paper constitutes a visual environment that absorbs the perceptual capability of the mind. The intensity of the visual images juxtaposed on the page recreates the urban environment through its spatial arrangement and not semantic analogy or description. Hulme here grants the urban environment its own subjectivity, which the poem expresses through the way it arranges verse. It is in this sense that Hulme's early writings in "Cinders," and that essay's later specification in "Notes on Language and Style" reflect Hulme's reading of Bergson and the way his writings resonate with Bergsonian concepts like intensity, intuition, and duration. The intensity of the visual environment, theorised in *Time and Free Will*, and examined in chapter four through Bergson's example of dimming candlelight shone on paper, is given practical precision in Hulme's association of the poetic practice with the urban environment's presence as spatial consciousness. Poetry, for Hulme, captures a temporal state shared by the metropolis and the mind through their qualitative capacity to experience visual intensity. Hulme's knowledge of Bergson shines through the great similarity between "the absolutely transforming influence of putting it into definiteness"

advocated in “Notes on Language and Style” and what Bergson calls “immediate consciousness,” that way something feels to us directly, before we stop to think about it, try to communicate it to someone else, or represent it symbolically in any way.<sup>249</sup>

Immediate consciousness experiences real duration, a “time of becoming” which recuperates a sense of heterogeneity from the levelling powers of objectified reality. It recognises the qualitative differences abounding in nature, and how this heterogeneity constitutes the very foundation of our existence (*Time and Free Will* 72). For Bergson, immediate consciousness denies the conception of time as space and further, space as the framework in which we think and speak of experience through metaphors of limitation and boundary. In contrast, the immediate consciousness of real duration experiences a heterogeneous spectrum of intensity, which Bergson privileges as the true domain of time. Hulme’s poetry recreates a sense of duration through the way it holds the reader in an inner state created through an immediate consciousness of the metropolis. “The Embankment (The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.)” elevates the spatial domain of the city to a consciousness heightened through a particular effect of vision:

Once, in the finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,  
In the flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.  
Now see I  
That warmth’s the very stuff of poesy.  
Oh, God, make small  
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,  
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.<sup>250</sup>



Hulme's first two lines juxtapose inner and outer space. The "finesse of fiddles" in line one evokes a sense of aural envelopment, as if the speaker were sitting in a concert hall listening to music performed outside the body. Further, that "finesse" signals the presence of a tangible border delineating the separate realms of musical performance and the perception of that performance by the ears and ultimately, the mind. This externalisation of experience pivots in the second line upon a "flash of gold heels on the hard pavement" to an internalisation of the speaker's physical location alongside the Thames. Through the "flash," the visual experience of space, as bordered by "the hard pavement" finds expression as a state of consciousness. The external sensory experiences in the first and second lines are internalised into a "warmth," "the very stuff of poesy." The final three lines yearn for a similar transition from external space to an interior state of mind. The speaker complains about the intensity of light in the night sky: The stars are too distant and too separated making their light disparate and cold. The celestial field external to the mind's eye wants condensing, to be made small, and thus warmer and more personal to the speaker. Here the space of the poem takes up the space of a consciousness; within its lines starlight gives off the heat of personality. Through a metaphor of condensed light, the external city takes on a state of consciousness through a Bergsonian duration evoked by light. The poem collapses a sequence of sense activity into one single event: hearing and touch pass through a flash that collapses sounding contact between heel and pavement into a subjective vision that draws sight inward.

The year "Embankment" was included at the end of Ezra Pound's collection *Ripostes* saw a surge of British interest in Bergsonian philosophy, wherein Hulme took

centre stage. From October 1911 to 1912, Hulme published an essay series on Bergson in the *New Age* while also lecturing on Bergson in London from November through December. In 1912 Hulme, with Bergson's avid support and very favourable recommendation in hand, applied for readmission to Oxford and was accepted. Andrew Thacker sees Hulme's interest in Bergson in these years articulating important trends and attitudes within modernism, especially Ezra Pound's dictum to "Make it New" and the ensuing close attention paid by poets and to the very material of language: "reforming, revising, or inventing new linguistic paradigms became crucial to the strategies by which modernism achieved self definition."<sup>251</sup> Thacker follows a Marxist analysis, reading Lukács to show how Hulme reifies language through a poetics that is rooted distinctly in the act of looking, and through its physicality resists the commodification of thought into "meaningless surfaces."<sup>252</sup> At the same time, however, Thacker locates Hulme's visuality in a gaze focused on the female body. He emphasises the synecdoche of the "gold heels" in line two of "Embankment" to contextualise Hulme within a "male Imagism marked by attempts to root one's self in the modernist maelstrom, often by fixing other in the spaces of one's poems."<sup>253</sup> However, while Thacker references Elizabeth Wilson's argument that the metropolitan *flâneur* is "a shifting projection of angst rather than a solid embodiment of male bourgeois power" to make an important argument regarding the social space of the city as a site of conflict over gender and sexuality, his critique misses the crux of Hulme's original poetical and philosophical intent. If "Embankment" is meant to reflect Hulme's notes in "Cinders" and "Notes on Language and Style" (and I think it does), then gender is only a secondary outgrowth of the way in which the poem invokes Bergson's concept of duration and its relation to poetic practice.

And yet Hulme is not wholly supportive of Bergson either. While Bergson does figure importantly into Hulme's writings, the distinction between the subconscious mind and the objectified space of the external world in *Time and Free Will* should not be interpreted as essential to Bergson's theories. Though they establish a very influential duality between private and public time, are based in part upon misunderstanding. Jesse Matz has shown how Hulme picks up on the mitigating circumstances destabilising the perceived dichotomy in Bergsonian temporality in *The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds* (1911), and rescues Bergson from misinterpretation, emphasising that the real duration does not necessarily render all human time free.<sup>254</sup> *Time and Free Will* notes repeatedly that the tendency to mistake time for space is vital to human survival. Space is the practical environment in which humans live, and so the intellect must naturally gear itself spatially.<sup>255</sup> The eventual loss of real duration to conscious perception is natural given the requirements of social life.

The metropolis precludes a life immersed in solipsism. While poetry allows one to arrange the fragments of modernity into a personal city, the personalised metropolis arrives only through one's ability to visualise the movement between them. The juxtaposition of images in Hulme's "Embankment" visualises modernity by moving between the temporalities of mind and external environment. The poem articulates the exchange between the two, rather than the privileging of mental time over external space. The "flash" of a high heel striking the pavement draws vision inward while also grounding that inward movement in an external environment, as exemplified by the "star-eaten blanket of the sky." The way Hulme negotiates pure duration in relation to the space of the metropolis, balancing private mental space and external public space, speaks to the way in

which the city accommodates multiple personalities into its structure and as a result, houses variant artistic visions and practices.

Doreen Massey describes cities as “the intersections of multiple narratives” and Peter Brooker goes a step further when he stresses the coexistence of modernities in the city, “each realised in its own time of the present and bearing the traces of past forms and possible alternative futures. Modernity is therefore at once a retrospective and forward looking project in which a present or prospective form can [. . .] critique and radicalise an earlier expression.”<sup>256</sup> This reflexive modernism harkens back to Baudelaire’s definition of modernity as “compromising the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the external and the immutable” in *The Painter of Modern Life* while also gesturing towards T.S. Eliot’s claim that the merit of “the mythic method” was that it gave “an order to the anarchy and futility which is modern society” and Ezra Pound’s motto that “literature is news that STAYS news.”<sup>257</sup> Following Brooker, I would like to examine the ways in which London accommodates two rather different, but overlapping Anglo-American modernisms, using Hulme and Bergson as a common background for examining Pound’s home-grown “image” and “cosmopolitanism” alongside Eliot’s more academically informed verse.

Though friends and collaborators, Pound and Eliot arrived in London at different times and from different American backgrounds. Pound embraced the figure of rejected academic after an ill-fated undergraduate career at the University of Pennsylvania and a briefly held lectureship at Wabash College that ended in scandal and dismissal. Pound

struggled with the conformist sensibilities of the university campus and saw London as the space in which he could claim a place amongst iconoclast literary artists and cultivate a literary persona. In contrast, Eliot earned his B.A., M.A. from Harvard University and visited London as part of a two year doctoral fellowship at Merton College, Oxford. While Pound eschewed the practicalities of daily life in favour of art, Eliot's lifestyle grounded artistic idealism in careful practicality; he came to England as part of his degree program, and remained there by holding successive positions as a tutor and bank clerk. With these summaries in mind, I would like to examine how Pound and Eliot use their American backgrounds to create an imaginative space in the maelstrom of modernist life in London, each evaluating the poetic possibilities in what seemed a literary metropolis in crisis.

The respective modernisms Pound and Eliot each develop through Hulme, academia, and personal theory exist side by side in London, neither necessarily affirming nor refuting the other.<sup>258</sup> While Pound lived under an almost self-imposed poverty while cultivating his aesthetic persona, Eliot worked hard to make a life in London as viable as possible, and took the financial practicalities of living in a big city to heart. He taught, clerked in the international division at Lloyd's Bank, and published numerous reviews and essays, all with the intent of making a good living while also being a good poet. He inserted himself into commuter culture while maintaining the perspective needed to comment upon it. Pound, in comparison, admitted to making London his own to Patricia Hutchinson: "Not Pound's LONDON. Pound's KENSINGTON," though such bombast ultimately worked against him.<sup>259</sup> Pound's didactic and imperative way of speaking set him apart as a loud-mouthed Yankee while his self-styled Whistlerian aesthetic was both out of date and out of place. Wearing a topaz earring, given to him by Arthur Symonds'

companion Alice Tobin, a gray velvet suit jacket with lapis lazuli buttons, and spats, Pound certainly struck a figure, albeit an annoying one. Where some saw an erudite, kind hearted companion, teacher, and dedicated artist behind the pose others saw a pretentious clown: “The truth is we are all tired of Mr. Pound,” writes F.S. Flint, “his manners have become more and more offensive; and we wish he would go back to America.”<sup>260</sup>

Though Pound left London in 1919 embittered, his feelings of betrayal did not extend to Eliot, who by this time was struggling to balance work with his devotion to poetry. Though Pound set different priorities for himself as an artist, he understood Eliot’s situation. Pound went so far as to arrange a scheme for subsidising Eliot, remarking, “It is a crime against literature to let him waste eight hours per diem in that bank.”<sup>261</sup> Indeed, Pound was well aware of the metropolitan forces allowing his own work and Eliot’s to co-habit London, for it was he who arranged the publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, the collection in which “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” appear.

## **II. Ezra Pound, South Kensington, and Urban Historicism**

Once he arrived in London in 1908, Pound established himself in the literary West End. He rented rooms in 10 Church Walk, adjacent to the Poetry Bookshop in Vigo Street, run by Yeats’ publisher Elkin Matthews, and began cultivating a literary persona that incorporated his Kensington neighbourhood into its very being. He was, to use his own words, “Not in London. Months, possibly years never east of Cursitor St.”<sup>262</sup> Opposite 10 Church Walk was John Lane’s, which had published *The Yellow Book* and would in future

publish the little magazine *Blast*. From the outset, Pound set his sights on the cultural level of the metropolis; London presented Pound with both cultural capital America lacked, and with a cultural capital available through a living tradition embodied in a social network of writers and artists.<sup>263</sup> Bitterly dissatisfied with how academia had appropriated the art of poetry, Pound set his hopes on London, hoping the new capital would accommodate his rather didactic criticism and dandy aesthetic, what with his trademark auburn afro, goatee, and earring.

Pound had never fitted into American culture, either in terms of fashion, belief, or demeanour. From his youth, he saw himself as an outsider, writing in 1920, “I was also brought up in a [. . .] city which my forbears had no connection, and I am therefore accustomed to being alien.”<sup>264</sup> And Pound made little attempt to assimilate himself into his surrounding environment. Doted upon by parents who were two of his greatest admirers, Pound cultivated a cocksure attitude in which he took on the role of parent, dispensing advice and rarely taking orders from anyone.<sup>265</sup> Pound was quick to take control of his education at the University of Pennsylvania, publishing the first of several essays on higher education all of which took on a common theme which railed against the scholar “compelled to spend most of his time learning what his author wore and ate, and in endless pondering over some utterly unanswerable question of textual criticism.”<sup>266</sup> Somewhat of a misfit-at-large at Penn, classmate William Carlos Williams wrote, “no one in a thousand likes him [. . .] because he is so darned full of conceits and affectation.” Indeed, Pound was thrown into a pond for ostentatiously wearing pink socks and remembered, though he had transferred to Hamilton College, as “Lily Pound” in the Class of 1904 yearbook.

Such early iconoclasm set the tone for Pound's later literary endeavours, many of which he imbues with a cosmopolitanism and superiority over those content to live within the bounds of one culture. Rather than read works from a set hierarchy of authors, Pound forged close relationships with a few select scholars, placing himself within an "Apostolic Succession" whereby "people whose minds have been enriched by contact with men of genius retain the effects of it."<sup>267</sup> But Pound saw himself as much as a touchstone for established academics as he saw himself as a student; in his relations with the teachers who mattered most to him, he saw himself as inferior as nothing save the information they could give him.<sup>268</sup> Pound understood himself to be an "unusual man" whose ironclad individualism made him both an inheritor and progenitor of civilisation. "Civilisation," concludes Pound in "Provincialism the Enemy" (1917), "is made by men of unusual intelligence. It is their product" and Pound most certainly fashioned his unusual and eccentric intellect into this persona.<sup>269</sup> Further, as an American who set to re-educate Europe, Pound cultivated a role specially fit to reform "the American college president, indifferent to the curricula of his college or university, and anxious only 'to erect a memorial to his father'. It is time that he and his like awoke from their nap, and turned out the ideal of philology in favour of something human and cleanly" (192).

"Provincialism the Enemy" articulates some of Pound's best arguments for establishing a metropolitan lifestyle. The essay brings London and Paris, as capitals of European civilisation, into proximity with a more distant United States. Here Pound uses the localised example of the university student to make a grander comment on modernity and the situation of the thinker in the metropolis. The stinging animosity he met in Philadelphia gives way to a sharp critique of provincialism as, "more than an ignorance, it



is ignorance plus a lust after uniformity.” Provincialism sets itself against the modern civilisation of England and France “because they have not been coercible into a Kultur; into a damnable holy Roman Empire, holy Roman Catholic Church orthodoxy, obedience, Deutschland uber Alles, infallibility, mousetrap” (190). “Take a man’s mind off the human value of the poem he is reading,” continues Pound, and “switch it on to some question of grammar and you begin his dehumanisation” (190,197). In this way, “Provincialism the Enemy” links young scholarship and artistic appreciation to a humanism damned by national borders and national identity but exalted in an internationalism where “transport is civilisation”:

Though if I care for anything in Politics I care for a coalition of England, France, and America. And after some years of anxiety, one sees the beginning of, or, at least, an approach to some such combination: America who owes all that she has to French thought and English customs, is at last beginning to take up her share in the contest. (199)

And yet coincidentally America takes up her share in the contest for modernity in the European city:

Ultimately, all these things proceed from a metropolis. Peace, our ideas of justice, of liberty, of as much of these things are feasible, the immaterial as well as material things, proceed from the metropolis. Athens, Rome, the Cities of the Italian Renaissance, London, Paris, make and have made us our lives. New York

distributes to America. It is conceivable that in a few centuries the centre may have shifted to the west side of the Atlantic, but that is not for our time. At present the centre of the world is somewhere on an imaginary line between London and Paris, the sooner that line is shortened, the better for all of us, the richer the life of the world. (200)

The American, then, makes up for his nation's shortcomings by accessing cultural centres like Paris or London. For Pound, the expatriate poet establishes for him or herself an ideal position from which to contribute to civilisation. It is as if Pound answered his own question when he moved to London in 1908: "And what man of unusual intelligence in our day, or in any day, has been content to live away from, or out of touch with, the biggest metropolis he could get to?" (202).

Living in London was in many ways a homecoming for Ezra Pound. Travelling gave him access to a higher civilisation and an escape from the provincialism that so limited his own "unusual intelligence." Pound needed to travel abroad to discover his own kind, to assert his artistic intelligence, and finally, to establish himself within the larger breadth of literary tradition. To a certain extent, Pound sought a living circle of poets and thinkers who bore the secrets of the dead. He found these secrets in W.B. Yeats, who in James Longenbach's words, "became Pound's personal Tireseas [. . .] Yeats became Pound's guide through a poetic underworld inhabited by Rhymers, Pre-Raphaelites, Victorians, Shelley, and Keats."<sup>270</sup> "In Durance," written during Pound's short tenure at Wabash College, confesses a deep seated unease in a poet so marked by self-importance

and alienation.<sup>271</sup> The lines below bespeak Pound's yearning for lands other than his own and might even stand as a personal manifesto of sorts:

I am homesick after my own kind  
And ordinary people touch me not  
Yea, I am homesick  
After mine own kind that know, and feel  
And have some breath for beauty and the arts. (1-5)

In fashioning himself as the lonely artist, Pound sets himself apart from humanity at large while at the same time opening a place for himself within a firmly established artistic circle. "Histrion" (1908), identifies the poet as both a lone innovator and a continuer of literary precedent:

No man hath dared to write this thing as yet,  
And yet I know, how that the souls of all men great  
At times pass through us,  
And we are melted into them, and are not  
Save reflexions of their souls.  
[. . . .]  
'Tis as in midmost us there glows a sphere  
Translucent, molten gold, that is the 'I' and into this some form projects itself  
(1-4, 11-13)

“Histrion” places himself at the forefront of poetic innovation while at the same time channelling spirits from the past through his poetic persona and into his work.<sup>272</sup> The final lines of the above selection are crucial here. They nominate a centre point which forms the poem’s intellectual ego, “that is the ‘I’,” through which “some form projects itself.” Given the metropolis’ significance in Pound’s writings on civilisation, education, and individual freedom, I would like to consider how “Histrion” works as the starting point from which Pound begins to see himself as an artist in the city, how the city takes up a place in his subjective consciousness, and finally, how that urban subjectivity projects itself back into metropolitan life.

New York, London, and Paris, when imagined as a single metropolitan triad in “Provincialism the Enemy,” keenly inform the way Pound represents his work as a reclamation and resurrection of the dead, and how such reclamation results in a newly clarified form of artistic consciousness. The metropolis in which Pound was so keen to live distinguishes the form and method of his writing; it is the “luminous detail” of his poetics, the method through which he establishes his poetics within the British tradition of urban writing while at the same time expressing qualities not in the art of his predecessors. Through the “luminous detail” of urban life Pound “draws latent forces, or things present but not unnoticed, or things perhaps taken for granted but never examined” in the way his poetry turns sharply from the dream-like opacity of symbolist poetry, condensing ethereal visions of a spiritual city into hard, high-contrast images.<sup>273</sup> Like earlier Anglophone urban poets, Pound looked to Paris for much of his influence, and there found himself greatly influenced by the work of French symbolist Remy de Gourmont. De Gourmont,

for Pound, “was irreplaceable [. . .] I think that every young man in London whose work is worth considering at all, has felt that in Paris existed this gracious presence, this final and kindly tribunal where all work would stand on its merits.”<sup>274</sup> In *L’Idéalisme* (1893) de Gourmont argues that symbols “will be imagined or interpreted according to the special conception of the world morphologically possible to each symbolising brain.”<sup>275</sup> De Gourmont then crystallises the relevance of symbolical thinking into a style based upon the creation of striking visual metaphors. The visual mind makes language express its immediate sensations, “that which enters through the eye [. . .] can only emerge from the lips after an original effort of transposition; to tell what one has seen is to analyse an image.”<sup>276</sup>

For Pound, de Gourmont set the standard for proper literary production, and his influence is clearly apparent in the well known Imagist manifesto “A Few Don’ts” (1913): “Direct Treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective; To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to presentation; As regarding to rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.”<sup>277</sup> Crediting Hulme with the first appearance of the “School of Images,” “A Few Don’ts” channels symbolist ideals into an image that is itself alive, instead of merely gesturing towards a higher realm of vitality. When used in an urban setting, Pound and Hulme’s Image becomes poetically sentient, in that it harmonises the poets’ subjective consciousnesses with their simultaneous awareness of the objective outer environment. This sort of urban aestheticism, which uses an image to express the poet’s dual awareness of mind and metropolis, exemplifies Pound’s early works.

The Image embodies Pound's self-awareness as "an unusual intelligence" in that it both separates him from a larger flock of conformists while at the same time aligning him with a select elite of established artists. Pound relied on *The Renaissance* in implementing the urban historicism discussed in "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris." "For the aesthetic critic," writes Pater,

the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, La Giaconda, the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandola, are valuable for their virtues, as we say, in speaking of a herb, a wine, a gem; for the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique impression of pleasure. Our education becomes complete in proportion to our susceptibility to those impressions increase in depth and variety. And the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, to analyse and separate its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a fair personality in life or book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue.<sup>278</sup>

For Pound, the virtue by which a picture produces a special impression of beauty or pleasure is that specifically enabled by the urban environment. In re-locating from the wearisome, conformist atmosphere of the American university, Pound uses London as a way to fulfil his self-conscious vision for the independent education of the individual in civilisation. Of course, he had himself very much in mind when writing "Provincialism the Enemy," but this self-awareness (or even pretentiousness) should not make his comments

too off-putting. Though many of Pound's London acquaintances found him grating and eventually intolerably aggravating, the critical acumen underlying his dogmatic writing arises through his ability to see himself through the city. The metropolitan environment is a major element predominating in and intensifying Pound's notion of individual freedom. He is modernism's quintessential man about town; the city provides the imagery for the way he presents himself as an actor of civilisation, and for what it feels like to act out the drama of civilisation on the stage of the city.<sup>279</sup>

Distinguishing between identities of citizen and man about town in the metropolis, James Donald identifies the citizen as the subject of law, citing anthropologist Marcel Mauss's Huxley Memorial Lecture of 1938: "Being a person was not yet perceived to be a universal attribute of humanity, let alone experience as a psychological reality. It was a status defined by law, ascribed to some and not to others in a ritual of naming."<sup>280</sup> The citizen allows himself to be named by society, and therein ascribes his or her notion of freedom and equality. The man about town presents himself before the naming powers of society, but in this case the sense of subjectivity provided by the law is characterised by a keen lack, a sense of loss that motivates the compulsion to heal the wound of modern culture.<sup>281</sup> Pound articulates this wound clearly in "Provincialism the Enemy" and attempts to redress its personal affect on him through the poetics advocated in "A Few Don'ts" and "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris." The artist, as man about town, dedicates his power of invention to hiding his sense of an interior, intimate self from the world. The big city masks one's attempts to destabilise subjective authenticity before the law, and instead provides the cover behind which the artist consolidates his consciousness. Looking back to Simmel, Pound's situation is very much "to preserve the autonomy of individuality of his

existence [unusual intelligence] in the face of overwhelming social forces [the university], and resist “being levelled down and worn out by a social technological mechanism” (*Metropolis* 13).

Pound’s poetic *virtù*, that element noted in “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris” as “peculiar to the soul of each individual artist,” manifests through his ability to circumvent the levelling powers of the city and instead locate individual, subjective consciousness as a category of the civilised, metropolitan mind (29). Though Pound rejects dogmatic authority, he asserts himself to select those groups, places, and individual mentors he feels contingent to his “unusual intelligence.” “In A Station of the Metro” (1915) juxtaposes Parisian, London, and Japanese sensibilities and contributes to the reader’s ability to experience a visionary interpretation of consciousness through combined images of European, British, and Asian cities.<sup>282</sup> “In A Station of the Metro” exemplifies the *phanopoiea*, that “casting of images upon the visual imagination” characteristic of Pound’s urban poetry.<sup>283</sup> These two selections “drive toward the utter precision of word” that reconciles symbolism’s mystical idealism with the overpowering sensory onslaught of the city:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough. (1-2)

The elegant juxtaposition of images in “In A Station of the Metro” infuses the speaker’s initial sighting of the crowd with a tranquil sensibility uncommon to the city. The rural



and the urban interpenetrate the two lines, with “apparition” allowing the “faces” in line one to exude the “petals” in line two. The point of this “imagisme” is that “it does not use images as ornaments. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language.”<sup>284</sup> Pound borrows from Japanese haiku here, creating a single-image poem; lines one and two are superimposed on one another, each the apparition of the other, each reflexive image conjured within the reader’s mind as a result of the other. Indeed, “In A Station of the Metro” provides a snapshot of the city at its exact moment of transition from the objective, exterior environment to the inner-consciousness of the speaker. The effect is not unlike the half-glance in Poe’s *The Man in the Crowd* to which Baudelaire refers in *The Painter of Modern Life*; however, instead of being swept away by the crowd as Poe’s speaker is, Poe elegantly manages synergy between the external, fragmented modernity of the city and the inner mind. “In A Station of the Metro” enacts a double vision with the poem acting as focal point between imaginative insight and ocular biology and debunks provincialism with astonishing clarity. Further, this double vision draws East and West together in a contact zone in which “peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations.”<sup>285</sup> Indeed, the poem’s visuality operates via Pound’s explicit attempt to link Eastern aesthetics with the British tradition:

The Japanese have had this sense of exploration. They have understood the beauty of this sort of knowing [. . .] The Japanese have evolved the still shorter form of the *hokku* [:] “The fallen blossom flies back to its branch: / A butterfly [. . .] The “one image poem” is a form of super-position, that is to say it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by

my metro emotion. I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we would call work 'of second intensity.' Six months later I made a poem half its length; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence ["Metro"] [. . .] In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.

(*Gaudier-Brezeska* 88-89)

Pound's experiment with haiku is a prime example of how the modernity of London assimilated other peoples, other geographies, into its spaces and as a result, allowed for its simultaneous visual presence in both the eyes and minds of London poets.<sup>286</sup> Pound's interest in the British Museum's two year exhibition of Chinese paintings from 1910 – 1912 and his correspondence with Japanese poet Yone Noguchi beginning in 1911 bespeak his wider interest in international cosmopolitanism, his disdain for "provincialism," and the city's role in encouraging artists to think visually.

Thinking back to Hulme, "In A Station of the Metro" has an effect very similar to that of "Embankment" in that both use the city to gain insight into the correspondence between the subjective consciousness and the urban environment. Both poems take an image of visual perception, for Hulme the flash of a high-heel striking pavement, for Pound the sudden glance of a face in a crowded street, and then use that image to evoke in the reader the sense of a sentient metropolis. The city is alive between the lines of "In A Station of the Metro" and "Embankment" through the way each poem juxtaposes the mental space of the speaker against a primary image taken from the urban environment.

The effect results in a perceptual vibration experienced by the reader, as the city is drawn into his or her mind while his or her mind is drawn simultaneously outwards into the street. Further, this vibration, as a common trait between the two poems signals the interest Hulme and Pound shared in Bergsonian philosophy. It is well known that Hulme and Pound were well acquainted from April 1909 until Hulme's death in 1913, and that Pound was a regular member of Hulme's Poet's Club, and a regular attendee of Hulme's Frith Street salon. Further, Pound attended Hulme's lectures on Bergson between November 23 and December 14, 1911.<sup>287</sup> From here it is possible to draw a correlation between the *phanopoeia* "Embankment" and "In A Station of the Metro" enacted by casting images of the city with the visual imagination and temporality Bergson conceives in the real duration. The urban image gives Pound and Hulme a sense of depth and exactness as each conceives his place in the social world; it imbues London with a subjectivity corresponding to each's individuality and self-image, just as the duration gives to the superficial reality perceived when one perceives reality as a countable number of objects in a fixed unit of space. Hulme explains,

If the various possible ideas about the soul at the present moment are represented by certain struggling factions in the market place, then my own opinion in this flux and varying contests seems, if I confine myself to the present, to be a very thin and fragile thing. But if I find that a certain proportion of the men of every generation of recorded history have believed in it substantially the same form that I myself hold, then it gains a sudden thickness and solidity [. . .] The difference it produces in the atmosphere of one's beliefs is like the difference which was produced in my

outlook on London in the year when I discovered by actually walking that Oxford Street does actually go to Oxford and that Piccadilly is really the Bath road.<sup>288</sup>

Bergsonian thinking allows Hulme to articulate the sense of continuity he feels between his inner being, or “soul” and the medium of his environment. Thinking, for Hulme, becomes synonymous with the street. Time spent moving up and down Oxford Street and Piccadilly reveals the time of the mind and so by negotiates a way around the dualist opposition between the subjectivity of consciousness and the objective world. Hulme continues,

Sometimes walking down an empty street at night one suddenly becomes conscious of oneself as a kind of eternal subject facing an eternal object. One gets a vague sentiment of being, as it were, balanced against the outside world and co-eternal with it [. . .] There exist, distributed in space, at this minute, so many centres of consciousness, just as there are so many electric lights in the streets outside. Is there any real resemblance between these two phenomena? Each light exists as the result of certain material conditions, and can be easily extinguished.  
(*Notes* 139-138)

*Notes on Bergson* leaves this question unanswered, though it does detail both sides of the argument. What is important here is the way Bergsonian thinking, for Hulme and Pound, underlies much of their poetical conceits (either directly or indirectly), as well as each poet’s attempt to assert his artistic ego against the numbing effects of empirical thought, as

expressed in “Cinders,” and social conformity, as expressed in *Provincialism the Enemy*.

In poetically imagining the metropolis as consciousness, Pound and Hulme’s urban

Imagism locates artistic freedom in the binary between the metropolis and mental life.

Through visuality, the mind and the metropolis find a shared focal point, which the Imagist poem encapsulates into an “intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”

Hugh Kenner draws a comparison between Pound’s “Metro” and Symons’ “Pastel”; both “present something visual, and does not ruminate or interpret. Yet it solves, in its inconspicuous way, the problem of what to do about a visibility once you have seen it”.<sup>289</sup> Thinking back to the in-depth analysis of “Pastel” in chapter three, the illuminating flash of a struck match lighting a cigarette, “Sudden, a flash, a glow, / And a hand and a ring I know.” focuses the reader’s attention onto “ruddy and vague, the grace / A rose the lyric of her face.” Like “In A Station of the Metro,” “Pastel” uses the visual immediacy of its primary image (a flash or a face in the crowd) to summon a second image from within the mind of the reader. Both poems hinge the presentation of two consecutive images around an act of visual perception. However, the “lyric face” that arises in “Pastel,” while located alongside the “flash,” does not actually surface in the external environment. Indeed, it is not meant to correlate with the external environment at all. The “lyric face” as a symbolist element, gestures towards a perceptual consciousness higher than the “dark in the little room” in which the poem’s imagery takes place. And it was this symbolist verse that Pound’s Imagism set out to reform, deleting self-indulgences, intensifying its virtues and elevating the glimpse into vision: “Dim lands of peace,” Pound writes, “Don’t use such an expression as ‘dim lands of peace’. It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer’s not realizing that the natural object is always

the *adequate* symbol” (*Retrospective* 5). In this light, “In A Station of the Metro” merges the perceptual moment of a face in the crowd with a moment of mental clarity. Pound allows the time of the city and the time of the mind to interpenetrate.

Indeed, Pound’s work delineates one literary trajectory taken after the *fin de siècle* in which the symbol imbeds itself in the immediate physical environment. The alternate realities suggested by Verlaine and Mallarmé situate themselves amongst the swirling fragments of modernism’s metropolis. However, the city also provided an alternate fate for symbolism. While Pound moved out of symbolism, T.S. Eliot moved deeper into it. Pound worked his way clear of systematised suggestiveness. Eliot, after some years’ infatuation with a peripheral symbolist poet, Jules Laforgue, worked more and more deeply into the central symbolist poetic.<sup>290</sup> But like Pound, Eliot integrated his knowledge of Eastern thought into the poetical structure of his work and his introduction to East Asian philosophies while at Harvard informs his approach to the metropolis. This influence arises rather explicitly in “The Waste Land,” perhaps his best known urban poem. However, elements of eastern philosophy and theology arise in earlier works as well, as the following section will explore through selections like “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.”<sup>291</sup>

### **III. T.S. Eliot, The City, and the Philosophical Tradition**

Like Pound, T.S. Eliot’s poetry has a deep-seated philosophical inclination. Indeed, having completed all the requirements for his doctorate in philosophy except for the final viva, it would seem silly not to consider Eliot’s academic background in a study of his

poetry. But unlike Pound, whose writings bear the marks of an almost imperious and bombastic ego, Eliot's deftly integrates his university supervisors and mentors into an equally articulate and incisive poetics. Eliot's assimilation of late nineteenth and early twentieth century thinkers while completing his B.A., M.A. and PhD coursework at Harvard has much to do with the way his poetic personae negotiate modernity and modernism. Pound would describe Eliot as the poet who had modernised himself "on his own" and such a remark bespeaks the keenness with which Eliot approached his studies, using them as an opportunity to formulate a distinct intellectual insight into the relationship between poetry and culture.<sup>292</sup>

As Peter Ackroyd implies, Eliot was raised a city child in the mid-west metropolis of St. Louis by a high-profile and highly influential Bostonian family. The pressures of such a life, living as he did amongst kin who appeared in Burke's *Distinguished Families of America* rather overwhelmed him.<sup>293</sup> Family had a formative influence on Eliot, especially in his decision to visit Paris after completing his M.A. and to later remain permanently in England after moving there as part of his PhD fellowship to Merton College, Oxford. His nervous mother, Charlotte Champe Eliot, was indeed close, if not smotheringly so, to her youngest son. Born with a double hernia, the young T.S. was often taken to bed and permanently excluded from sports at school, circumstances which brought him into the orbit of literary life. And yet Eliot was by no means sheltered from the landscape of his home city, which had begun a slow decay into shabbiness and grime by the time of Eliot's birth. Eliot took impressions of urban Missouri with him to London; the fog of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is the fog that blew from the factory chimneys across the Mississippi River and into St. Louis.

Eliot did well at school, took a postgraduate year at Milton Academy outside Boston, and entered Harvard as an undergraduate in 1906. The young scholar saw Harvard as a place to work, and complained openly about the indiscipline and laziness of his fellow students. For Ackroyd, Eliot's temperament seems to have been "acutely aware of waste, of the emptiness of passing days, of the need to use time, to put a stamp on it."<sup>294</sup> At Harvard Eliot developed a passion for English fin de siècle poetry and in it found a poetics that would haunt his writing ever after. In his second year Eliot took classes in French literature, started reading Baudelaire and for the first time encountered a "personage who combined morbidity with extreme self-consciousness, a poet who raised the imagery of the metropolis to a high degree of intensity and then wrapped it around himself so that it became an echo chamber for his own suffering."<sup>295</sup> In the winter of his third and final year (Eliot graduated one year early) he discovered *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and in it found a kindred spirit. Symons' reception of Jules Laforgue as a writer of verse in which "Everything may be as strongly its opposite as itself," and for whom "this balanced, chill, colloquial style [. . .] has, in the paradox of its intensity, the essential heat of the most obviously emotional prose" offers Eliot a model for fashioning a poetics based around irony and self-parody.<sup>296</sup>

*The Symbolist Movement in Literature* framed a poetics which for Eliot had up to this point been a vague state of mind. Given the awareness of Baudelaire he gained during his second year at Harvard, Laforgue marked the point of Eliot's absorption in fin de siècle writing. According to Hugh Kenner, "the fact that Laforgue discovered the potentialities of self-parody not in poetry at large but in the poetry of a circumscribed era,



in a lyric mode closely allied with Symons, one alone among the possible derivations from Baudelaire: this fact helps explain is sudden power to engulf a man [. . .] in the first decade of the nineties.”<sup>297</sup> In Laforgue, Eliot found the poet who would shape later personae who would “prefigure as he walks through half-deserted streets the further phases [. . .] of the invulnerable cycle in which he was entrapped.”<sup>298</sup> Irony and parody allow the poet to express a multi-valenced consciousness through speakers who partially step outside their own experience and look upon themselves from an external, second person perspective.

For Laforgue and Eliot, irony produces a duality of ego correspondent to simultaneous unity and multiplicity of reality. Further, Eliot, under the tutelage of Irving Babbitt in his Master’s level French literature course, worked out a preliminary framework for working out this paradox of unity and multiplicity in terms of classicism and romanticism. Babbitt rejects romanticism because it allows for an “anarchic individualism” and evades moral responsibility. Classicism, on the other hand, expresses what is “normal” and “central” in human experience; it is not local or national but universal and human. Through Babbitt, Eliot came into contact with a great problem at the intersection of philosophical and literary discourse and the time: the problem of “the one and the many,” in which the artist struggles to associate himself with broadly with human experience while at the same time maintain a personal identity.<sup>299</sup>

Laforgue, according to Symons,

has constructed his own world, lunar and actual [. . .] frivolity becomes an escape from the arrogance of a still more temporary mode of being, the world as it appears to the sober majority. He is terribly conscious of daily life [. . .] And he sees the possibilities for art which come from the sickly modern being, with his clothes, his nerves (*Symbolist Movement* 59).

Symons' assessment of Laforgue, and Eliot's subsequent integration of *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* into his writing proves so important because it highlights two distinguishing elements of Eliot's poetry: first, the brutal cynicism and parody of the modern metropolis that exposes the isolation of the urban individual and second, the attempts that individuals make to strike up a community within the city. In effect, Symons depicts a paradox inherent in Babbitt's work: the negation of a world of particulars, "the many," inherently involves the condensation of the personal ego. The unification of the multiplicity of urban life into a general "human" experience is unavoidably subjective and idealistic. Trapped as the symbolist poet is between a dream of unity and an objective, uncontrollable plurality, the only recourse toward unity is in subjectivity itself, a unity between differing subjective constructions of the external world. This subjective unity, which is also a distance within subjectivity itself, makes up Laforgue's irony and is a key component of Eliot's poetic voice.<sup>300</sup>

The scenes of urban desolation in Eliot's "Preludes" sequence characterise the way in which Eliot folds symbolist irony into his writing, and how, as a result the city represented in Eliot's poetry becomes the environment in which the philosophical

conundrum of “the one and the many” plays out. Henri Bergson’s philosophy plays a key role here as well, given that Eliot spent a year in Paris after four years at Harvard and earning his master’s degree, and attended Bergson’s lectures at the Collège de France. Though Eliot eventually rejected Bergson’s distinction between realism and idealism, his work did not fail to make an impact on Eliot. In the following analysis, I hope to show how “Preludes” raises many of the problems Eliot found in Bergson’s thinking, and how a sense of irony inherited from Laforgue repositions Bergson’s argument in light of the symbolist city.

Bergson grounds his theory of duration in an argument that sees quantity and quality as distinct. The world of counting and numbers delineate a spatial reality made up of a multitude of discrete, separate objects. Consciousness, however, inhabits a time, as opposed to space, in which the experience of the objectified world manifest as interpenetrative, qualitative intensities, as exemplified through the stages of dimness seen in candlelight. Eliot takes issues with this opposition, doubting the distinction between quantitative and qualitative multiplicity. Qualitative intensity, for Eliot, remains a measureable factor and thus leads human subjectivity from the inner time of the mind to the external realm of space. Is the world of language, through which man mediates his immediate consciousness in spatial terms, really essentially different from consciousness itself, or is it merely a reversible shift in viewpoint? In literary critical terms, Eliot’s denial of an essential distinction between consciousness and objects works both ways. What counts as a conscious state, as opposed to an objective one, depends on the arbitrary line we draw between them. Part of the poet’s task is to objectify states of consciousness, but there is continuity between the conscious state and the objects used to express it.<sup>301</sup> The

metropolis figures into the continuity between subjective consciousness and objective expression through its capacity to accommodate multiple realities simultaneously into a unified, though greatly heterogeneous field.

“Preludes” is divided into four movements, each focusing upon a specific consciousness of the city at a given moment. Each section begins with Bergsonian intensity. Qualitative sensations of smell and touch define each one, and the speaker delivers them as if he were providing an inner narrative of a sequence of mental states experienced by an unnamed persona. Indeed, individuality is almost completely elided. The speaker only refers to this persona through anonymous states of perception centred around the pronouns “you,” “your,” and “his.” Through these pronouns Eliot’s speaker articulates the city as a time of being, channelling the urban environment through the real-time activity of sense perception: “the winter evening settles down” or “the morning comes to consciousness”. Stanzas I –IV begin, respectively, with the following lines:

## I

The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steaks in passageways.  
Six o’clock.  
The burn out ends of smoky days.

## II

The morning comes to consciousness  
Of faint stale smells of beer  
From the sawdust-trampled street  
With all its muddy fete that press  
To early coffee-stands.

### III

You tossed a blanket from the bed,  
You lay upon your back and waited;  
You dozed, and watched the night revealing  
The thousand sordid images  
Of which your soul was constituted;

### IV

His soul stretched tight across the skies  
That fade behind a city block,  
Or trampled by insistent feet  
At four and five and six o'clock; (1-4, 14-18, 24-28, 39-42)

And yet each respective stanza then moves from a unified time of consciousness to an image of linear time. Stanza III shifts from an image of a tossed blanket unfurling into a period of waiting to the enumeration of “the thousand sordid images.” The shift in stanza IV is even more pronounced; “the soul stretched tight across the skies” splits into a stampede of stomping feet let loose by rush hours between four and five and five and six o'clock in the afternoon. The effect has a rather Hulmean feel reminiscent of the final lines of “Embankment,” though Eliot reverses the visual effect brought about by an image

of stepping feet: The sky in stanza IV fades instead of brightening, and the stampeding commuters block out the flash of heel on pavement so central to Hulme's poem. But the smouldering end of a smoky day in stanza I relights in the dawn of stanza II. "Preludes" uses the fragmented images of city life to posit the coexistence of multiple subjectivities within the city. The poem introduces the reader to four distinct points of view, while also using repeated images to blend each aspect into a holistic perspective of city life. The above selections exemplify a Laforgian irony in that they use banal, even crude objects like cigarette butts, beer and bed linen to illustrate the interpenetration of conscious feeling with items from the external environment. The image of a sun rising from the fading cherry of a fag end is darkly comical; the seeming incongruence between the sun and a cigarette and the poem's subtle melding of their light into a single optical effect expose our mistaken predilection as readers to think that feeling and thought are exclusive.<sup>302</sup>

In "Cinders" and "Notes on Language and Criticism" T.E. Hulme uses the concept of "counters" as a way to critique a perceptual environment defined through space and thereby draw the urban environment into the subjective consciousness. Eliot however uses counters to place consciousness back into the urban environment, advocating a city whose objective reality allows for the coexistence of multiple subjectivities and ably merges the otherwise partial views of subjective and objective experience (19). "Preludes" uses the city as a vehicle for mediating the Bergsonian ideas Eliot encountered in Paris after completing his B.A. and M.A. with the philosophies he studied once he had returned to Harvard in 1912 to begin a PhD in philosophy. The city negotiates Eliot's poetic output and philosophical study, preventing too close a relation between his poetics and the other forms of discourse at his disposal. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) Eliot

proposes “to halt at the frontiers of metaphysics or mysticisms and confine itself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry.”<sup>303</sup> He does just this in “Preludes,” reconciling the line between human consciousness and the material environment through the geographical frontier of the city. This concept of “frontiers” points to a more subtle philosophical frontier at the heart of Eliot’s work, to which he alludes in the introduction to his doctoral thesis. Later published as *Knowledge and Experience in the philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (1964), Eliot comments upon a frontier in which objective and subjective perspectives meet and mix: “Everything, from one point of view, is subjective; and everything, from another point of view, is objective; and there is no *absolute* point of view from which a decision may be pronounced” (21-22).

F.H. Bradley’s work on the ways in which subjective consciousness perceives an objective world through a spectrum of perception converges in Eliot’s urban study, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (1917) with more esoteric belief systems taught in the Harvard philosophy department’s curriculum. Cleo McNelly Kearns offers an insightful account of Eliot’s graduate training in Buddhist and Hindu philosophy and its implications for “The Waste Land” and “Four Quartets” in *T.S. Eliot and the Indic Traditions* (1987).<sup>304</sup> Kearns’ study develops an argument in which verse traditions originating in the Indian Subcontinent, which he studied at Harvard, shape the way in which Eliot articulates modernism as a literary style and modernity as a cultural phenomenon encountered by the individual. Eliot read portions of the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads in the original as part of his philosophical training, and therein gleaned a theory that priestly speech or song has an analogue in the role and function of the poet and poetry. Through Eliot, the modern poet takes on the role of Hindu priest in that his verses, like priestly incantations, take on

the responsibility for initiating and fostering the social and spiritual life of the community.<sup>305</sup> “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” works out a poetic frontier between Eastern and Western thought through the way it implements Vedic incantation taken from the Patanjali *Yoga Sutras*, and through this frontier the poem portrays urban modernity as a fusion between the subjective observer and the observed object.<sup>306</sup>

Eliot intersperses concepts from the Eastern and Western traditions across “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” to express the city’s means for expressing the feelings of mental life in unity with their object. The opening stanza has no clear subject or object, focusing instead on the “whispering lunar incantations” (4). From this point on, the poem works its way through an evocation of merged sensibility. In the first lines, the “reaches of the street” are “held in lunar synthesis” and do not coalesce around a unified subject until the final third of the stanza (2-3). Here sensation roots itself in a clear identity, seemingly grounded in the lit street though which the speaker walks: “Every street lamp that I pass / beats like a fatalistic drum” (8-9). These lines make it seem as if the speaker’s poetic identity will be conveyed through a linear deployment of space and time; indeed individuality only takes shape once the unidentified emotional consciousness that starts the poem moves through the streets under lamp light. And yet the light illuminating the speaker in the poetic environment is conspicuously inconsistent. It beats, and thus only partially reveals the space around it. Further, the fatalistic beat established in the first stanza quickly deteriorates in the second, thus destabilising the speaker’s perception of the environment:



Half past one,  
The street lamp sputtered,  
The street lamp muttered,  
The street lamp said, 'Regard that woman  
[. . .]  
You see the border of her dress  
Is torn and stained with sand  
And you see the corner of her eye  
Twists like a crooked pin.' (13-16, 19-22)

In the first lines, the street lamp seemingly controls the spatial environment in two ways. It first manages the way the city forms the speaker's perceptual environment and second, manages the formal space of the poem itself. The speaking lamp delineates the trajectory of the subject's vision, telling him where and what to look at, and so doing the same for the reader. However, the irregularity of the light's sputterings and mutterings also destabilises the visual field of the poetic environment. The poetic identity "you" is forced to look at the woman, but the lamplight only identifies her as twisted. The corner of her eye is given a clear location in the poem, while at the same time it moves of its own accord, its gaze apparently beyond the control of the flickering street lamp. As a result, it is almost impossible to track how the poem's individual consciousness forms an awareness of the surrounding reality. Is it memory or immediate perception? When the individual looks at the woman and follows her twisting eye line, does he look down the lit street, or into a shadowy nothingness? The latter seems most immediately true, for the next stanza begins "The memory throws up high and dry / A crowd of twisted things" but then the

fourth stanza pulls out from memory as the street lamp commands, “Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter” (23-24, 35). The poem seems out of control as it alternates between stanzas replete with the bizarre imagery of twisted branches, rusted springs and a cat that “devours a morsel of rancid butter” (37).

The speaker cannot make sense of his environment because the street light, instead of shining through objects, renders them either opaque or threateningly reflective. The street refuses a conscious mind desperate to make visual contact and visual sense. It “could see nothing behind that’s child’s eye” (40). Instead of making contact with a fellow mind, the speaker’s vision only refracts across the cityscape, revealing more eyes which are not only inaccessible to the speaker, but seem just as disoriented by twisting vision as he is. These “eyes in the street / Trying to peer through lighted shutters” cannot see through their own oblique view of a street whose unsteady light must bend across the edges of their apartments’ window blinds (41-42). But I don’t think the difficulty of this section confounds the poem as a whole. Rather, it points us towards new possibilities. The third and fourth stanzas offer a sequence of visions in which the urban environment initiates the speaker’s poetic identity by illuminating the street before him; this illumination also confounds any further identification of the landscape except through a confounding series of metaphorical twists. But troublesome as they are, the effects of refraction and reflection across the surface of an opaque city hold the key for grasping the purpose behind Eliot’s poem.

“Rhapsody on a Windy Night” portrays the city as a frontier or borderland through a psychology meditation similar to that described in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, which Eliot studied at Harvard in 1913. Patanjali’s meditative practice advocates a restriction of mind through which the practitioner experiences a wider power of vision. The meditator no longer processes the world by focusing on a set of discrete phenomena, via an expanded ability to know reality as a sequence.<sup>307</sup> “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” mixes memory into the speaker’s unstable visual sense of the city through images of twisting, flickering light and it is at these points the speaker meditates. His failure to see anything but trauma is significant, for the twisted eye in the second stanza along with the flattened cat and peering eyes in the fourth form a latent poetic association which conveys the speaker’s emotional situation. They constitute the “lunar synthesis” beginning the first stanza and bear the poem’s power through moments of passion which convey “depths of feeling into which we cannot peer” (64). Murray McArthur argues that Eliot composed “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” through a cipher, citing the essay “Reflections on Contemporary Poetry” (1917), in which Eliot describes the conceit driving a poet’s work as a “particular hexagonal or octagonal polygon.”<sup>308</sup> For Murray, this geometric cipher is the master signifier through which the poem manifests, even though its very presence in the poem is nothing in and of itself. Instead, the cipher is a place of dialectical contradiction which sets the poem in motion.

The speaker, in my opinion, holds the place of cipher in the poem. His identity coalesces from a pattern of sensations illuminated by the city light, only to be immediately threatened as that light twists across the field of his perception. For Donald Childs, the coexistence of perception and recollection in the poem, and the apparent uselessness of the

speaker's attempts to stabilise his view of the city, is the poem's goal, for simultaneous perception and recollection realises Bergson's concept of duration.<sup>309</sup> But the twist denies the stable, inner subjectivity required that would allow the speaker to avoid the mediating factor of space and thus perceive the city in the pure time of consciousness. Rather, the cipher bears out all the elements of space, vision, consciousness, and subjectivity as a sequence of coexistent and inclusive possibilities. The speaker fails to see this, and this failure bespeaks Eliot's actual intention for the poem. "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" expresses the poetic potential for the meditative concentration Patanjali believes will bring about a fusion of the observer and the observed, the "shining forth in consciousness [. . .] emptied of self."<sup>310</sup> I do not mean that Eliot intends a giving up of physical reality, but rather that consciousness is empty to the extent that it is no longer self-sufficient; it cannot persist independent of the causes and surrounding conditions of its surrounding environment. It is only because things exist in a relational way that they exist at all.

This concept of relational existence follows from Eliot's exposure to Madhyamika Buddhism at Harvard, and from it a method of presenting reality in such a way that nothing exclusively positive or negative can be asserted of it. Nirvana, or salvation, in Madhyamika Buddhism is not an escape from the world but an epistemic revolution which corrects any philosophy's claim to universal validity. This denial of absolute reality of theoretical claims implies acceptance of their equivalent conventional validity.<sup>311</sup> The great success in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" arrives through the way it holds together a tradition of urban writing by showing how it simultaneously satisfies the intellectual demand for meaning and allows for a complexity of meanings unavailable to any one theory or system. The city Eliot presents is a poly-vocal one that harkens back to Symons'

tale of urban cacophony, “Christian Trevalga.” But the sharp dissonance conveyed in “Rhapsody”, instead of bringing metropolitan men and women to their knees, suggests the possibility of a mind as multi-valenced as a crowded city. “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” brings together the studies of urban life presented by Symonds, Simmel, and Hulme and restructures them around a hybrid philosophical system developed from Bergson, Hulme, Bradley, and the Vedic and Madhyamika traditions. This allows the urbanite to portion his experience between the mental states of inner subjectivity and the sense-bound states of sense-bound perception. The street lights in “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” shift between their spatial position in the urban environment and the psychological “twist” the speaker undergoes when he follows their light across the eyes of the street woman. But the balance between these states is not at all worked out in the poem, and that is as Eliot intended it. The twisting illumination of the cityscape lights a field visualised within the interior spaces of the mind and then shunts that vision outwards. What the inner eye sees superimposes onto the physical qualities of the metropolis: sounds, textures, spatial layout, and identifiable objects. The result is an urban poem more versatile than either Hulme’s or Pound’s because it resists their tendency to bring the metropolis under mental control while at the same time tempering a romantic symbolist tendency to dazzle the reader with invocations of the absolute.

Ronald Schuchard establishes tight links between Hulme’s philosophical writings and Eliot’s scholarly approach to literature, noting Eliot’s inclusion of “Embankment” in his syllabi while teaching extension courses for Oxford, the University of London, and the London Borough Council, specifically his “Syllabus of a Course of Six Lectures on Modern French Literature,” published by Oxford in 1916. Eliot integrated Hulme’s

criticism of French Romanticism into his teaching curriculum and more particularly, included “Embankment on his students’ required reading list.”<sup>312</sup> Eliot’s awareness of Hulme arises in poems like “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” which are unwilling to allow the speaker to find easy meaning in a heightened state of consciousness. The poem leaves the speaker trapped between the irreconcilable differences between the world of counters and the world of duration. Its street lamps allude back to Hulme’s question in “Cinders,” “Why is it that London looks pretty by night? Because for the general cindery chaos there is a substituted simple ordered arrangement of a finite number of lights” while at the same time complicating the possible application of Bergsonian philosophy to the grim monotony of the city’s commuter populace.

Indeed, the intermittently lit streets are a proving ground for Eliot’s speaker, whose potentially heightened consciousness is clearly limited by the exigencies of urban life. As such, “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” complicates both the symbolist ideal of spiritual emancipation and in the city, echoing Hulme’s belief that “When the Romantic becomes blind to the fact of his limited and imperfect nature, he turns inward to establish and glorify a hierarchy of values originating within himself and based on the facts of his own ‘unlimited’ existence.”<sup>313</sup> The speaker’s despairing, almost disdainful tone at the end of the poem, that “last twist of the knife” in the final line toes the line between Christian Trevalga’s physical breakdown and the starry city which Hulme’s speaker in “Embankment” may fold round him “and in comfort lie” and the “petals on a wet, black bough” which transforms the spatial, geographic city into a conscious awareness within Pound’s ego. Eliot has no intention of controlling the city either spatially or temporally;

rather he implicates and then quickly refutes both in the twisting cipher driving “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.”

Hugh Kenner’s assessment of Eliot as “undeniably his time’s chief poet of the alarm clock, the furnished flat, the ubiquitous telephone, commuting crowds, the electric underground railway” stands up to poems like “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” in that it admirably references the way Eliot navigates his poetry through the physical and psychological space of commuter London without giving over to either.<sup>314</sup> His 1916 lectures as an adjunct for Oxford and the subsequent publication of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” in *Prufrock and Other Observations* explore how poetry mediates the ex-patriot artists situation in London through the attributes of an unnamed subject whose psychological and physical understanding of the metropolis as reality is curtailed by alien status. Eliot had some difficulty reconciling his familial roots in America with the artistic possibilities London offered a talent like his. His parents, especially his mother were desperate for him to return to Harvard and complete his PhD *viva voce* and take his place amongst the Boston elite. The Eliots wanted their son to be a citizen of America the nation, of American academia, and American gentility. But Eliot disdained such a transparent life, eschewing his position as a citizen of name at home and taking up the more difficult, but more rewarding mantle as a London man about town. Eliot embraced metropolitan life because the artificially lit city, with its sputtering lights and impenetrable dark spaces, allows spatial forms and temporal processes to coexist. Light (or the absence of it) creates the effect through which Eliot and Pound synthesize their stylised poetic modernities into the city.

Eliot, in 1926, during his Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, discusses poetry in the context of a system which counters a growing dissociation of sensibility from thought and feeling. His talks highlight a metaphysical sensibility which “can devour and amalgamate all experience, however varied, whereas the normal man perceives his experience only as fragmentary.”<sup>315</sup> Metaphysical poetry “is that in which what is ordinarily apprehensible only by thought is brought within the grasp of feeling, or that in which what is ordinarily felt is transformed into thought without ceasing to be feeling.”<sup>316</sup> The expressive capability described here plays significantly in Eliot’s early poetry, as both “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” use physical sight and the observation of visible light to mark the ways in which individuals feel the fragmented space of the urban environment.

Tom Gibbons’ argument that the direct influence of Arthur Symons’ studies of French poetry on early twentieth century poetics calls us to reconsider what the “modern movement” in poetry stood for.<sup>317</sup> What I hope to have shown is how, within the scope of Baudelaire’s *The Painter of Modern Life* and Eliot’s *Prufrock and other Observations*, the modern movement is very much informed by the visual techniques and processes invoked by the urban environment on its inhabitants. The portrayal of city life in essays, novels, and poetry depends upon the ways writers see and visualise the metropolis, and these observations in turn are driven by the forms through which modernity manifests there. Chapter four’s emphasis on Symons’ account and critique of Symbolist poets Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* extends important links between explorations into the implications of the modern city on artistic life, as represented in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century writing. Eliot



specifically acknowledges his debt to Arthur Symons in a review of Peter Quennel's *Baudelaire and the Symbolists*: "I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt: but for having read his book, I should not, in the year 1908, have heard of LaForgue or Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière."<sup>318</sup> In his *Sacred Wood* essay "The Perfect Critic" Eliot relates how *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* was "an introduction to wholly new feelings, as a revelation."<sup>319</sup> Indeed, Symons' work, alongside that of Baudelaire, Swinburne, Wilde, Michael Field, Pound, and Eliot, traces out a series of revelatory literary visions in which the city is both the means and medium for interpreting the energies of life in the built environment.

## Conclusion

The writer's relationship to the city and the practice of city writing is enabled by paradox. The urban writer sees the metropolis with his own eyes and writes about it with his own hands, and yet the energies powering these processes arise from the metropolis. The author is both a writer of the city and the medium through which the city articulates itself. The momentary energies of the individual poet or novelist arrive within the lasting energies of the city. Charles Baudelaire accounts for this association by linking Parisian writing with the urban environment's essential quality of being. Contantin Guys, *The Painter of Modern Life's* namesake, comes closer to expressing city life than any other because "he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains" (5). Guys articulates a historical theory of beauty in which the fashions of individual artistic expression encapsulate the underlying and pervasive timelessness of the city. He is Baudelaire's perfect *flâneur*, who in seeing metropolitan life in a condition of convalescence, frees his conception of the city from ego: "He is an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive" (10). Baudelaire understands urban writing as something which arrives through the artist's ability to identify with the city; his or her willingness to let the metropolis take them over, and from this, distil the eternal presence of the city from the individual mind's singular, fleeting experience of it.

My concern has been to place this practice of distillation in a particularly visual operation. The urban artist must see the city as it appears before his eyes and as it appears

within his mind, and then translate this double vision into a text or an image. Baudelaire makes it his business in *The Flowers of Evil* and *The Parisian Prowler* to look for that quality called modernity, to extract from the fashions of Second Empire Paris “whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory” (*Painter of Modern Life* 12). Analysing selections like “The Eyes of the Poor,” “Carrion” and “The Swan” sets the impetus for tracing the inheritance of Baudelairean modernity in England, and how English authors cope with the paradox of urban writing set out in Baudelaire’s writing. Algernon Charles Swinburne’s essay “*Charles Baudelaire*” *Les Fleurs du Mal* offers an incisive reading of Baudelaire’s work; the essay’s call for artists to produce work “of their nation” not “for their nation” extends *The Painter of Modern Life*’s interest in the urban writer’s capacity to elide personal ego and maximise sensory experience within the metropolis.

Swinburne sees himself as a descendant of Baudelaire’s poetic voice, which he inherits through a shared vision of the Sapphic body. Baudelaire’s Parisian vision of Sappho’s suicide at the Leucadian cliffs in “Lesbos” brings about Swinburne’s London vision of Sappho in “Anactoria.” The poem uses kissing and the exchange of bodily fluids to visually map the isle of Lesbos into a geographic representation in verse. Following Baudelaire’s lead, Swinburne uses lyric poetry to chart Sappho’s voice into the body of his own verse. He translates the original Sapphic fragment “Anactoria” into his *Poems and Ballads* series via a violent modernity enabled by bodily paradox. Like the urban poet who must write the city by allowing its energies to channel through him, Swinburne translates Sappho by writing a textual body that will sing her song. The vision of Sappho found in “Anactoria” arrives through Swinburne’s ability to rip and tear his way into the text of the

original fragment, and from there, re-voice the original text into his own verse. The process comes to completion in “Ave Atque Vale.” A fluid textual exchange between the kisses and saliva of “Lesbos” and the bloody wounds of “Anactoria” allows Swinburne, Baudelaire, and Sappho to merge into one jointed and articulated textual body. “Ave Atque Vale” finds continuity between the disparate spaces of Greece, Paris and London.

The *Poems and Ballads* series continues the practice of urban writing set out in *The Painter of Modern Life*. Swinburne is able to translate his verse into a Sapphic body only by following the precedent specifically set by Baudelaire in “Lesbos,” and more generally, *The Flowers of Evil*. The Parisian poet’s ability to see an “eternal” metropolis coexisting within the fashioned spaces of the Second Empire allows Sappho to arise in the nineteenth century city. In turn, the specifically visual qualities Baudelaire associates with modernity informs Swinburne’s ability to translate Sappho; in writing “Anactoria,” Swinburne takes the ancient, eternal verse of Sappho and overlays it with his own lyrical voice. Sappho is his eternal muse, he the fashionable form of her nineteenth century existence.

In writing about the Ancient Greek body, Swinburne models how later fin de siècle authors might negotiate the space of the city within their own texts. Swinburne’s inheritance of Baudelairean modernity enacts an ekphrastic visual practice through which London artists negotiate the paradoxical problem of urban writing: they must write the city while also letting the city write through them. “Hermaphroditus” gives sculpture life in verse, and so doing sets an example for how the artist might more fully engage with the environment of his subject. In *The Picture Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde examines how the

city dweller might find eternal youth amongst the seemingly innumerable array of sensory impressions available in the metropolis. The desire shared between Lord Henry Wotton, Basil Hallward and Dorian Gray catalyses the city's power to make an urbanite ever-young through his ever-new life about town. Michael Field revise Wilde's fantastic tale; instead drawing the city into an ego-driven search for stimulation, Cooper and Bradley investigate how the kinetic energy of urban transport might draw them into the painted world of the London gallery. Their collection *Sight and Song* combines the dynamic aspects of verse enabled by train travel with the static nature of the painted image. Ekphrasis allows the rhythm of the verse to hold a painted image still so that it might be entered. Arthur Symons combines the work of Wilde and Field and applies ekphrasis directly to the city. Poems like "Pastel" in *Silhouettes* and "Nora on the Pavement" in *London Nights* allow the city to become immediately apparent through its own means. Each selection traces the trajectory of light through an urban scene and across lines of verse. Symons' poetry places the reader directly in the city, as located by the light of lit cigarette in "Pastel" and a streetlight in "Nora on the Pavement."

Recalling the preface to *London Nights*, Arthur Symons describes his urban poetry as driven by a notion in which "the whole visible world itself is but a symbol, made visible so that we might apprehend ourselves, and not be blown hither and thither like a flame in the night" (166). And yet this symbolist vision is itself complicated by the exigencies of modern life. The urban experience is not still and city life is in constant motion. While ekphrasis ably transfers the movement of metropolitan life to the rhythm of verse, one cannot live through art alone. Symons, however, is well aware of this and as we have seen, takes issue with his own inner city ekphrasis in the short story "Christian Trevalga." The

story proves so important because it highlights the incompatibility of a solipsistic, artistic lifestyle with practical, everyday city living. It is a turning point in how the influence of Baudelairean inheritance affects British urban writing. No longer is the urbanite able to put the energies of the city to his or to her own use. Instead, Symons' titular musician finds it impossible to arrange his life in London according to the harmonics of piano music. The jarring cacophony of street life drives Trevalga mad; he collapses at a street corner and is then moved permanently to an asylum. "Christian Trevalga" examines the central problem of urban writing by explicitly questioning the precise relation between the space-time of consciousness and the space-time of the metropolis.

Seeing the city in "Christian Trevalga" leads early modernist writers and philosophers to a reimagining of poetic consciousness in relation to the metropolis. T.E. Hulme's writings in essays like "Cinders" and Henri Bergson's theories in *Time and Free Will* respond to Trevalga's inability to count the frenetic sound and motion of human traffic into a spatially organised rhythm. Bergson and Hulme seek to resolve agoraphobic reactions to the external environment by re-orientating conceptions of mind and city away from visions of space and towards visions of time. In distinguishing qualitative experience from quantitative experience, Bergson argues that the field of sensory perception occurs on a mental gradient. Similarly, Hulme denounces literature and poetry that use words as "counters" to describe material reality as an assemblage of discrete units. In aligning poetry and perception along a continuity of specifically mental perception, such thought enables poetry to become a metaphor for a metropolis as a state of mind. No longer should artists grapple with the problem of expressing the immediate space of the city. Instead, urban writers should use text to qualitatively express how the metropolis manifests in

thought. Resulting poems like Hulme's "The Embankment (The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.)" use verse to articulate the interpenetration of poetic speaker and city. Lines like "Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy, / In the flash of gold heels on hard pavement. / Now I see / The warmth's the very stuff of poesy" join the speaker's internal awareness to his perception of the external environment. The "ecstasy" in line one combines with "the flash of gold heels" to form an enduring "warmth." Indeed, the speaker's perception of heat arises from the resonance between "ecstasy" and "the flash," and therein between the speaker's self-consciousness and his visual sense of the embankment walkway along the Thames. Further, this interpenetration allows the American expatriate poets Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot to integrate personal subjectivity with an otherwise foreign metropolis.

Together, Pound and Eliot work from Symons' poetics in *London Nights* and his inheritance of French poetry in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. The London borough of Kensington provides the initial means through which Pound articulates his aesthetic identity within a tradition of British writers in "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris." "In A Station of the Metro" juxtaposes a Parisian scene with Pound's London identity. Further, Pound's poem echoes Symons' use of an immediate visual image in "Pastel," here the lit end of a cigarette, to summon a second image from within the mind of the reader. The faces Pound sees in a Parisian crowd trigger the imagined image of "Petals on a wet, black bough." For Eliot, Symons' reception of Jules Laforgue enables crowded and littered streets to articulate a line of enquiry into the city's role as a frontier between stable consciousness and fragmented, seemingly disparate visions of the city. Modernity for Eliot arises through the city's ability to balance images from "the burnt out ends of smoky days"

in “Preludes” and the “whispering lunar incantations” of “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” Reading about Laforgue in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* enables Eliot to locate the urban writing practice within the city’s ability to hold multiple subjective constructs of the external world within itself. “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” reference Baudelaire’s historical theory of beauty while also coordinating that reading of modernity with Symons’ assessment of French Symbolist poets. The painter of modern life, it would seem, expresses both the energies that move the city from fashionable form to fashionable form and the visual apprehension of those energies as consciousness. Seeing in the city encompasses not only the physical presence of the urban writer within the metropolis, but also how the space of writing and the space of the city combine into the time of thought. The urban writer thinks himself into the city and the city thinks itself into the mind of the writer. Visuality traces how the paradox of urban writing introduced in *The Painter of Modern Life* adapts to the practices urban writers use to find meaning in the metropolis.



- <sup>1</sup> Julian Wolfreys, Writing London vol. 2: materiality, memory, spectrality. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2004.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Valéry, Oeuvres ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard 1957-60) 686-87.
- <sup>3</sup> Emile Zola, Nana trans. George Holden. (London: Penguin 1972).
- <sup>4</sup> Wolfreys 7.
- <sup>5</sup> Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory. An Introduction. (Oxford: Blackwell 1983) 19.
- <sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida and Antoine Spire, Au-delà des apparences (Latresne: le bord de l'eau, 2002), 20.
- <sup>7</sup> David Baguley, Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1990) 222.
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